

CHILLING

TALES OF HORROR

JUNE

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AFTER
DEATH
EPITAPES

The SHADOW In The MIRROR
THE BLOODSTONE

PLUS OTHER TERRIFYING TALES OF THE SUPERNATURAL

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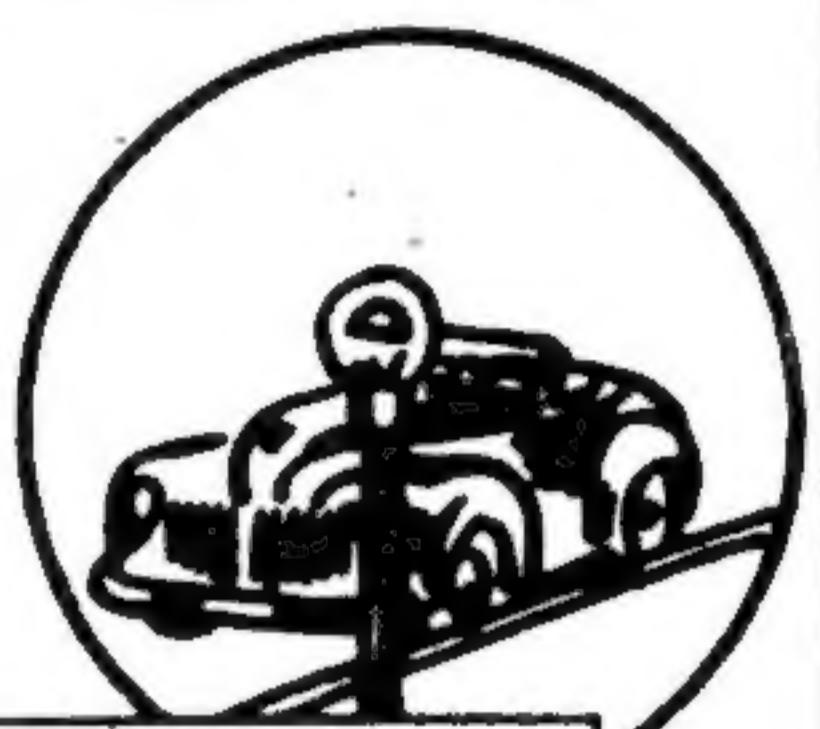
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CHILLING

TALES OF HORROR

JUNE 1969

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1



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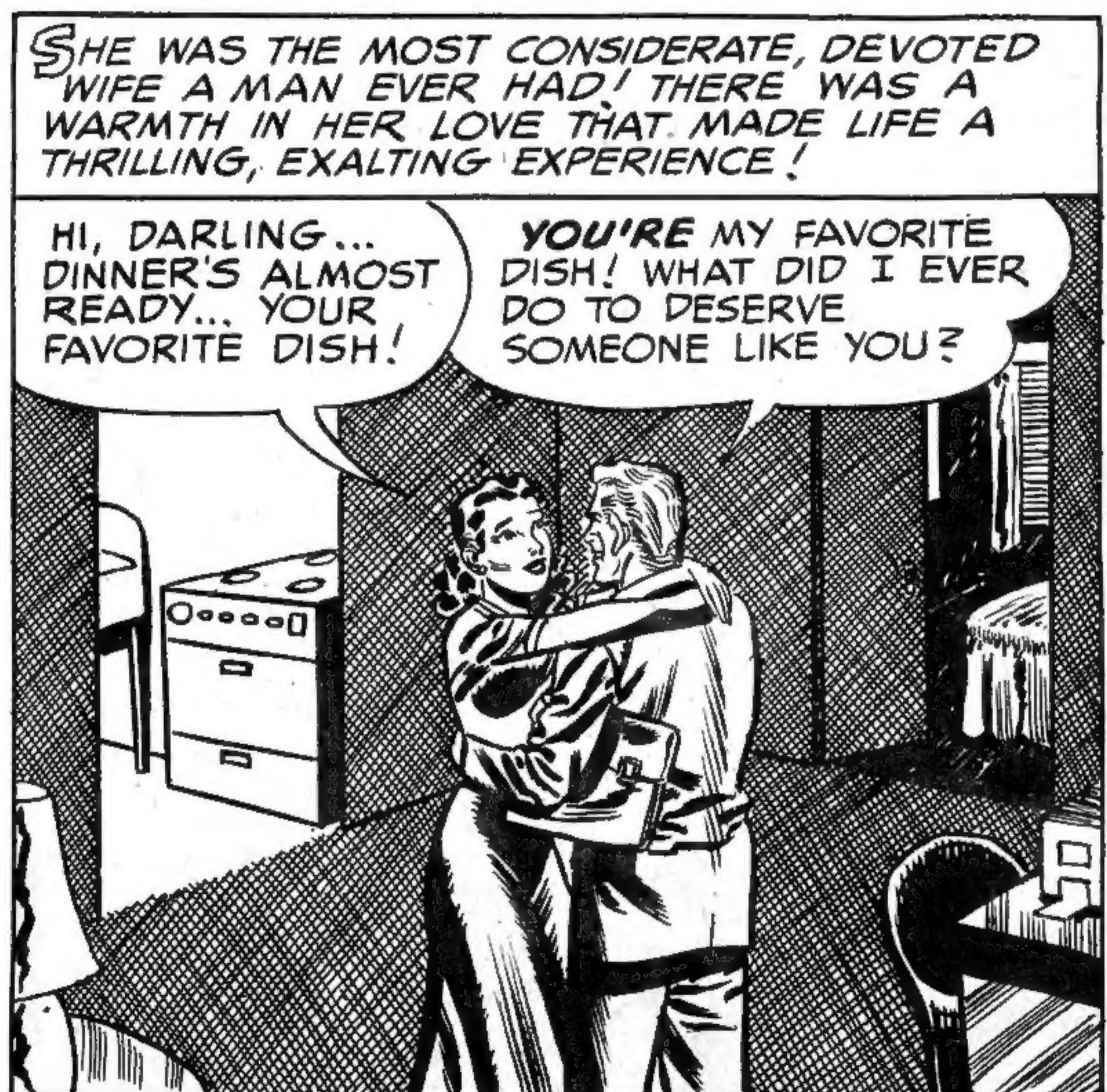
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IT IS FORTUNATE INDEED THAT EULOGIES TO THE DEAD ARE WRITTEN BY THE LIVING... FOR HOW DIFFERENT IT WOULD BE IF THE CORPSE COULD WRITE ITS OWN...

EPILOGUE



BUT ONE DAY, AFTER ONLY SIX MONTHS OF WEDDED BLISS, I CAME HOME AND MIRIAM WAS NOT AT HOME TO GREET ME! THERE WAS PANIC IN MY HEART... A TERRIBLE PREMONITION OF DISASTER...



GRANTICALLY I SEARCHED THE HOUSE! THERE WAS NO NOTE OR ANYTHING! I CALLED ALL THE PLACES SHE MIGHT BE AT... FRIENDS, RELATIVES... FINALLY I CALLED THE POLICE, HOPING AGAINST HOPE THAT MIRIAM WOULD COME WALKING THROUGH THE DOOR BEFORE THEY ARRIVED, AND YET FEELING DEEP INSIDE THAT SOME TRAGEDY HAD BEFALLEN HER...



THEY FOUND HER BATTERED BODY AMONGST THE ROCKS AT THE FOOT OF THE CLIFF OVERLOOKING THE OCEAN...



NO MAN WAS EVER SO GRIEF-STRICKEN AS I... IT WAS AS THOUGH A PART OF ME HAD DIED WITH HER... MIRIAM, MY MIRIAM WAS GONE... ALL THE HAPPINESS AND JOY AND WARMTH AND LOVE WERE GONE... GONE FOREVER...



I WATCHED THEM BURY HER... AND WITH HER, MY HEART... THE TEARS FLOWED FREELY DOWN MY CHEEKS AS I WEPT UNCONTROLLABLY... UNASHAMED...





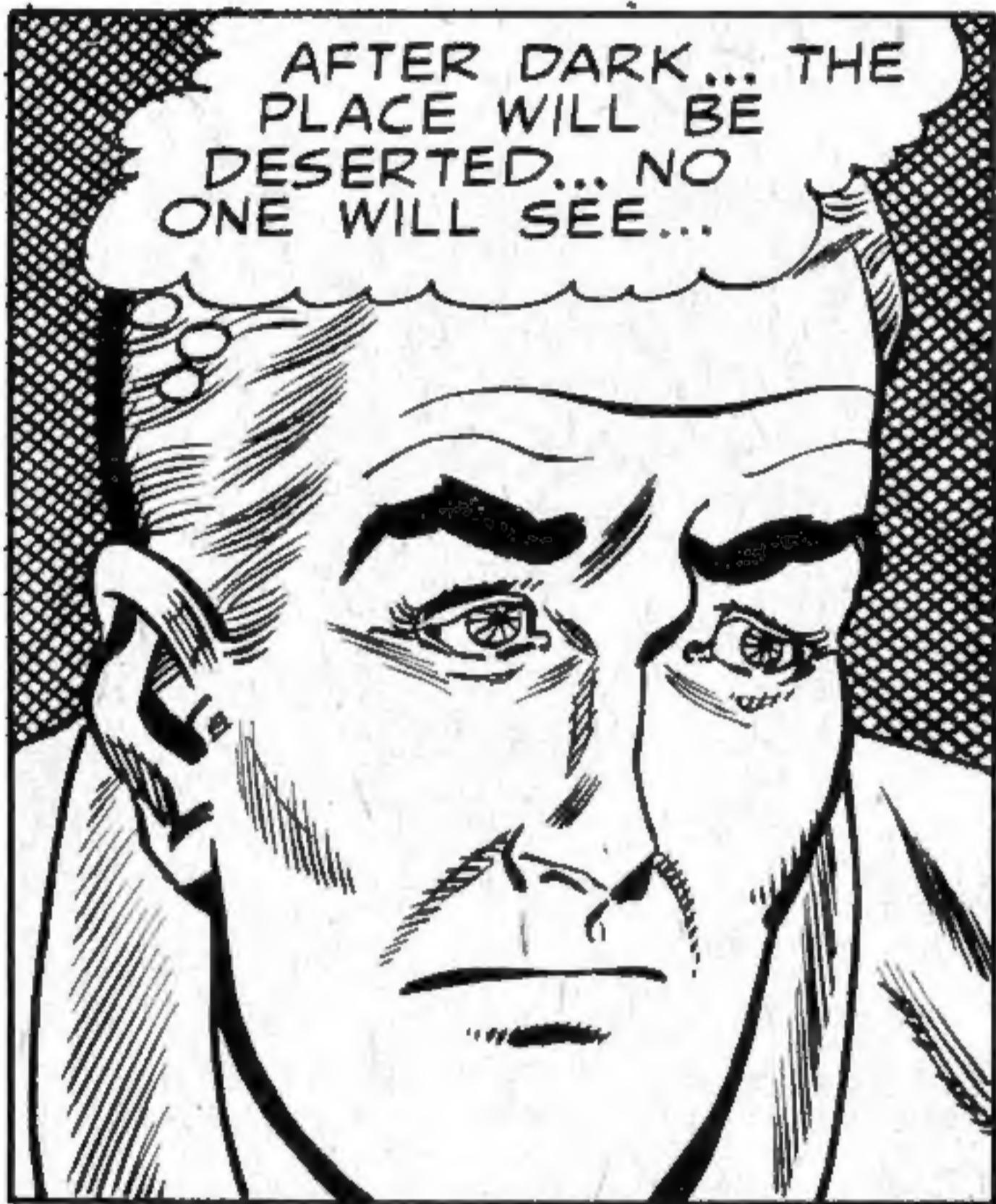
I RETURNED TO OUR COTTAGE, BUT I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO ENTER! I THOUGHT OF ALL THE HAPPINESS THAT WE HAD ONCE SHARED TOGETHER WITHIN ITS WALLS... A HAPPINESS THAT I KNEW I WOULD NEVER AGAIN KNOW...



SUDDENLY I HAD A POWERFUL LONGING TO SPEND THE NIGHT AT HER GRAVE... TO MOURN AND WEEP AND POUR OUT MY ANGUISH... TO BE WITH HER FOR JUST ONE MORE NIGHT...

BUT IN THE DARK, I COULDN'T FIND IT... I COULDN'T FIND MIRIAM'S GRAVE! FRANTICALLY I SEARCH AMONG THE GRAVES WINDING MY WAY THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF STONES AND MARKERS...

I STUMBLED... FELL... THERE WAS A SHARP, SEARING PAIN ON THE SIDE OF MY HEAD...

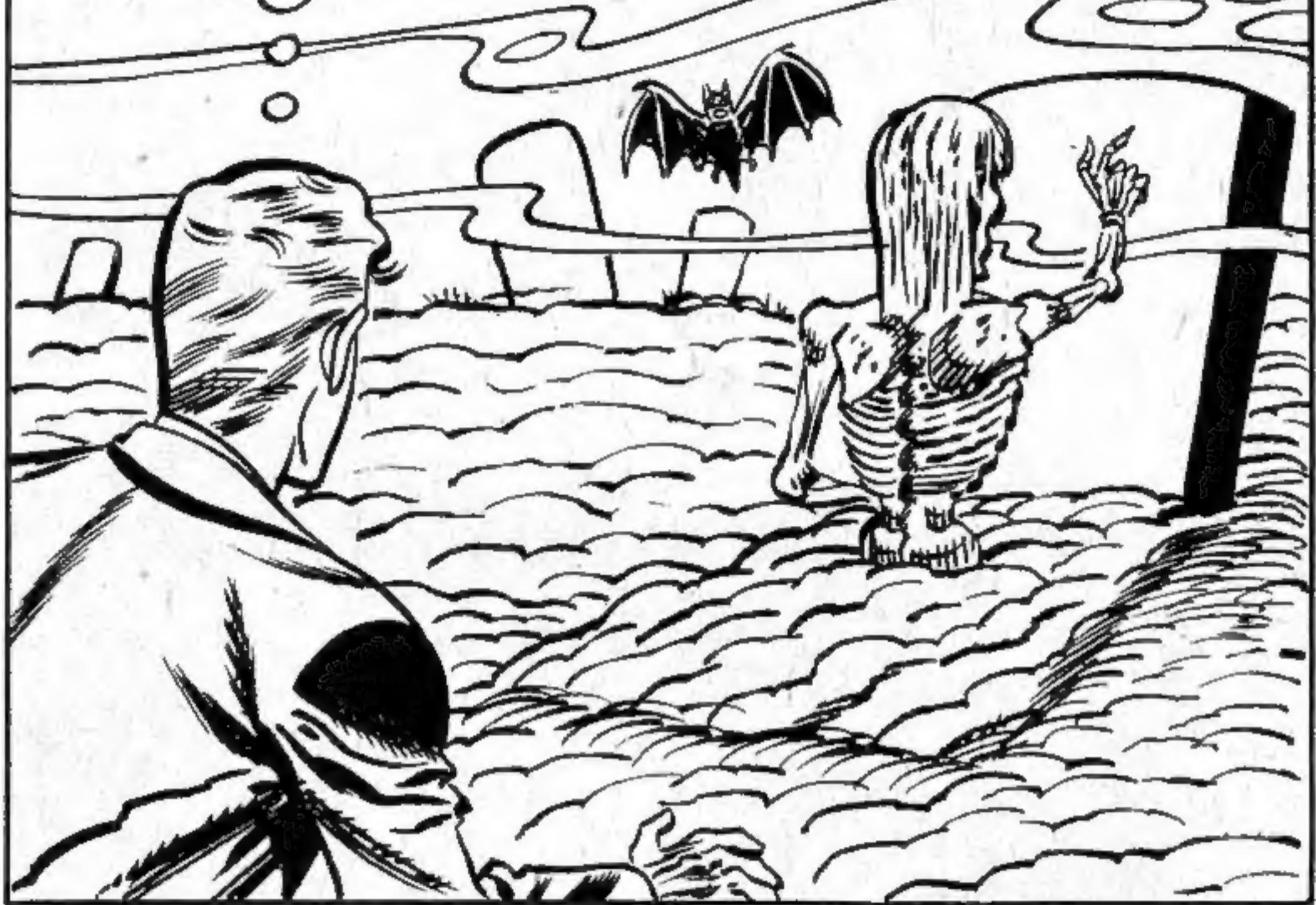


I SPRANG UP AND LEAPED BACKWARDS... AND NONE TOO SOON... FOR JUST THEN THE MOST FANTASTIC THING OCCURRED. A HORRIBLE, HALF DECOMPOSED CORPSE ROSE STRAIGHT UP FROM THE GRAVE AND SEEMED TO BE READING THE INSCRIPTION ON ITS OWN HEADSTONE...

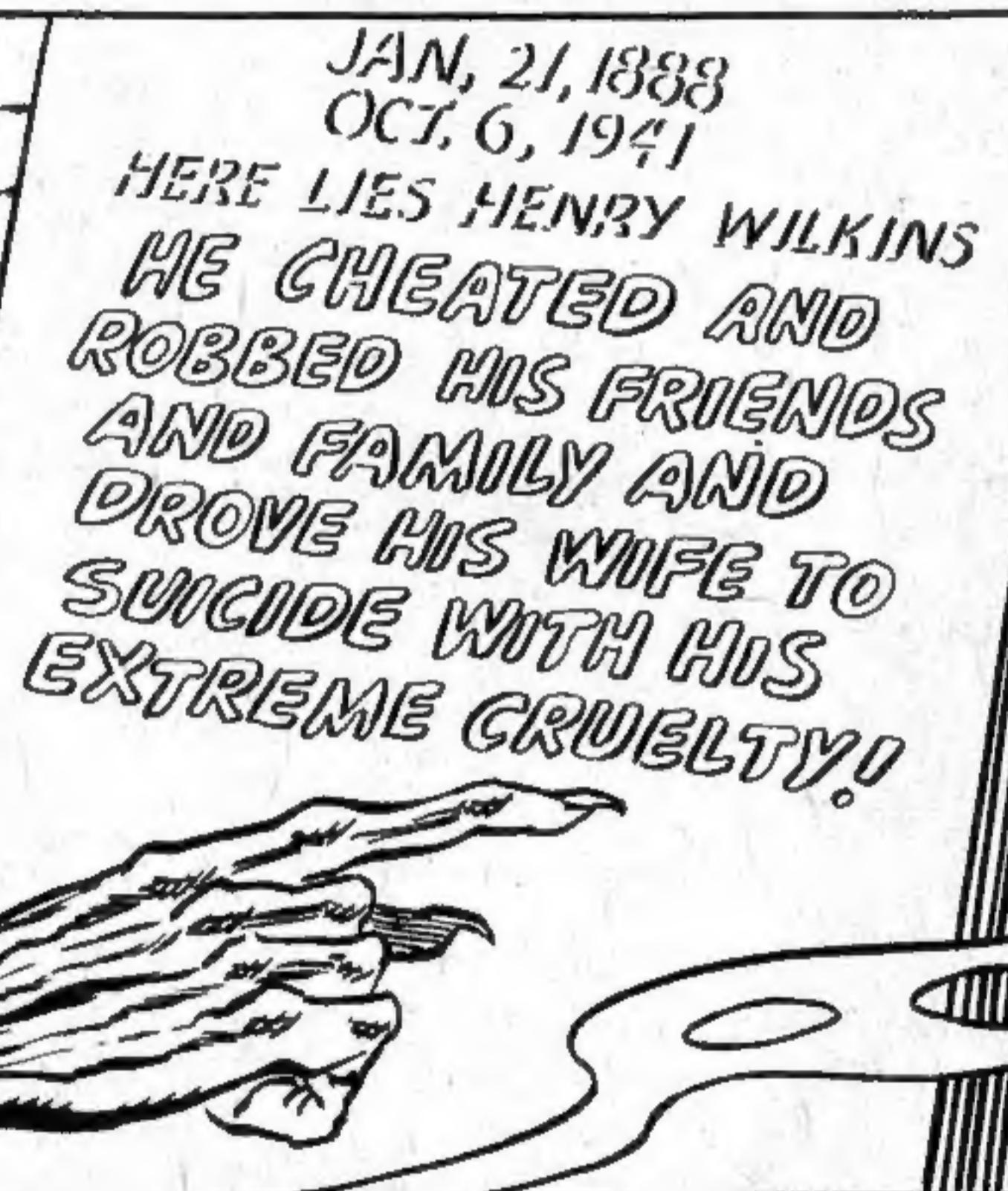


SUDDENLY IT BEGAN TO MOVE ITS HAND ACROSS THE FACE OF THE STONE AS THOUGH IT WERE WRITING SOMETHING...

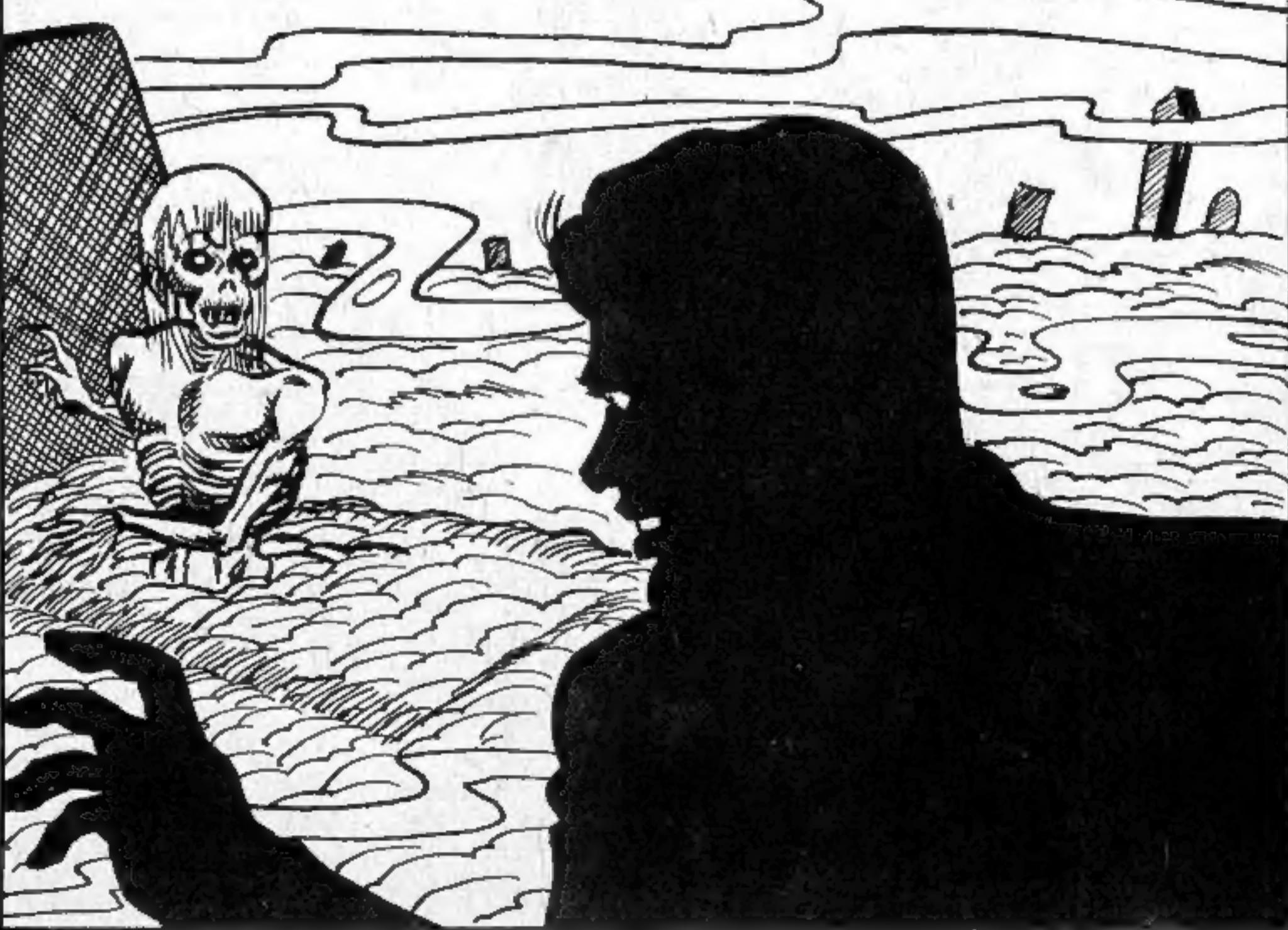
WHAT'S IT DOING?



... WITH THE POINT OF ITS FINGER, IT HAD WRITTEN IN LARGE IRIDESCENT LETTERS A NEW EPITAPH, OBLITERATING THE ORIGINAL ONE. WHERE BEFORE IT HAD READ "HIS HONESTY, INTEGRITY, AND KINDNESS WILL LIVE FOREVER," NOW IT READ...



IT WAS UNBELIEVABLE... A CORPSE CORRECTING ITS OWN EPITAPH... I TRIED TO SHAKE OFF THE VISION BUT IT PERSISTED! SUDDENLY IT TURNED AND FACED ME... ITS COLD DEAD EYES FIXED IN AN UNBLINKING, TERRIFYING GAZE...



IN PANIC, I TURNED TO RUN WHEN THE HORROR OF ALL HORRORS GREETED MY EYES...

NO... NO... THIS IS SOME FANTASTIC NIGHTMARE!



FROM OUT OF EVERY GRAVE HAD RISEN ITS OCCUPANT... SOME HALF DECAYED... SOME PARTLY DISMEMBERED... OTHERS SHOWING THE BEGINNINGS OF DECOMPOSITION. IT WAS A MACABRE PANORAMA OF THE DEAD... AND EACH WAS INSCRIBING ON HIS TOMBSTONE HIS OWN EPITAPH... BARING HIS SOUL IN CONFESSION...



SUDDENLY I THOUGHT OF MIRIAM... MY BELOVED MIRIAM... SHE TOO MUST BE ASCENDED FROM THE GRAVE... ONCE AGAIN I WOULD FEAST MY EYES ON HER LOVELINESS...



DESPERATELY I RAN AMONGST THE GRAVES, DODGING THE HORRIBLE SPECTRES OF THE DEAD... SEARCHING, SEARCHING FOR THE FACE I SO ADORED...



AND THEN I SAW HER... IN THE MIDST OF ALL THOSE RISEN, SCRAWLING CORPSES I FOUND HER...

THERE SHE IS!
MIRIAM... MIRIAM,
MY DARLING!



I RAN TO HER SIDE, CALLING HER NAME... BUT SHE NEITHER SAW NOR HEARD...

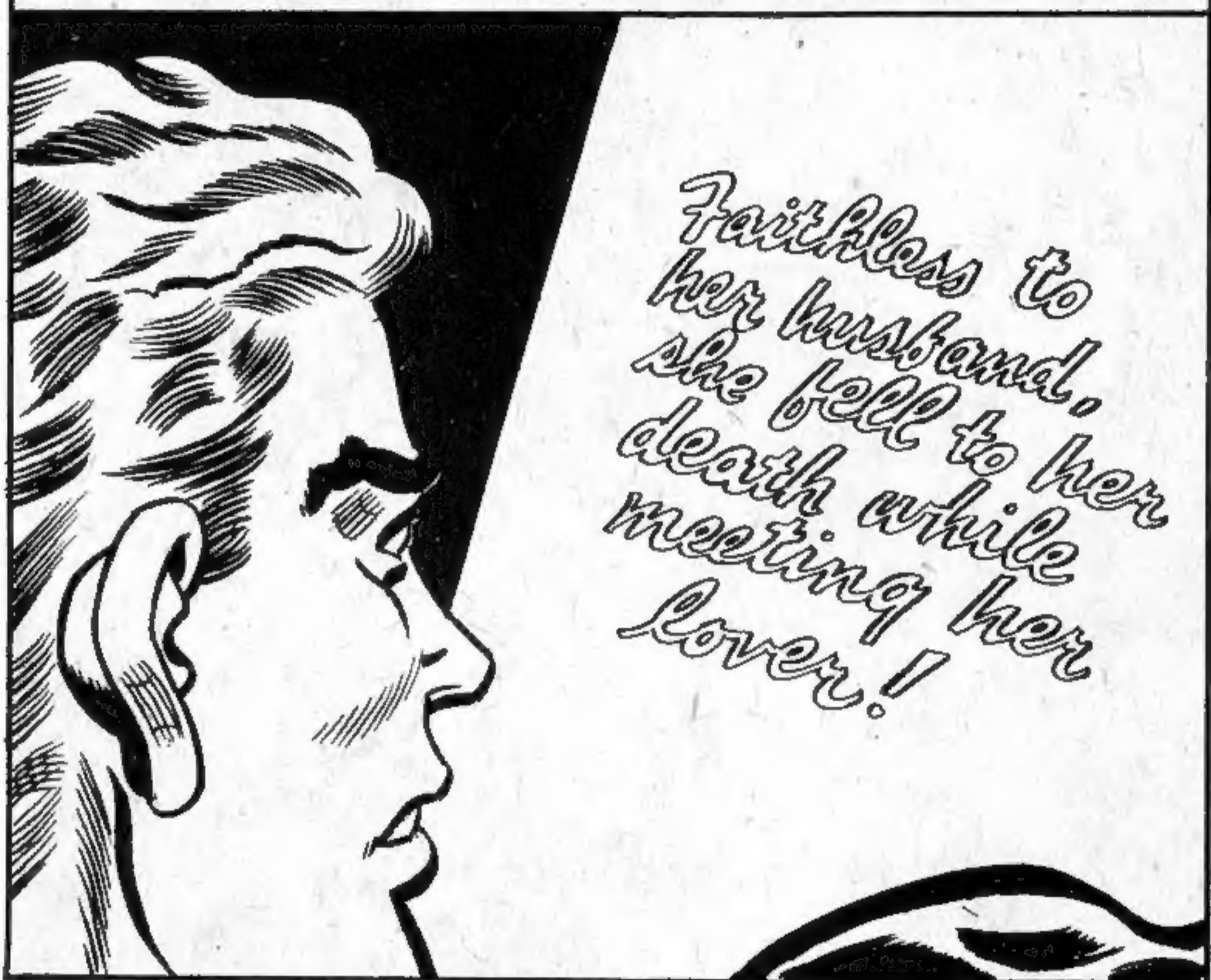
MIRIAM... IT'S I,
EDGAR, WHO LOVES
YOU AND WHOM...



MIRIAM, TOO, WAS REWRITING HER EPITAPH... HER INDEX FINGER MAKING GRACEFUL CIRCLES OVER THE FACE OF HER GRAVESTONE...



WITH FEARFUL EYES, I READ WHAT SHE HAD PENNED IN BOLD, LUMINOUS SCRIPT. WHERE BEFORE HAD BEEN WRITTEN, "NO GREATER LOVE DID MAN EVER RECEIVE FROM WOMAN," I NOW READ...



THE NEXT MORNING, THEY FOUND ME SPRAWLED ACROSS HER GRAVE... UNCONSCIOUS.

LOOK AT HIS FINGERS... ALL BLOODY AND COVERED WITH DIRT! LOOKS LIKE HE WAS TRYING TO DIG UP HER GRAVE WITH HIS BARE HANDS!

YEAH... FUNNY WHAT SORROW DOES TO SOME GUYS!



THE END

LET THEM LAUGH... TEASE... TAUNT... BUT I HAD THE ANSWERS... SAW THEM IN...



I TOOK HELEN HOME THAT NIGHT... AND WE ARGUED AS WE HAD ALWAYS DONE ...



I DIDN'T SLEEP THAT NIGHT... I COULDN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF LOSING HELEN...

WHAT CAN I DO...
WHAT CAN I DO?



I DON'T KNOW WHY I STOPPED IN FRONT OF THE SHABBY STORE FRONT... SOMETHING SEEMED TO GUIDE MY FOOTSTEPS... BUT SUDDENLY I SAW IT...

WHO'S KIDDIN'
WHO?

WISHING MIRROR
TAKE A LOOK
MAKE A WISH
IT WILL COME TRUE!

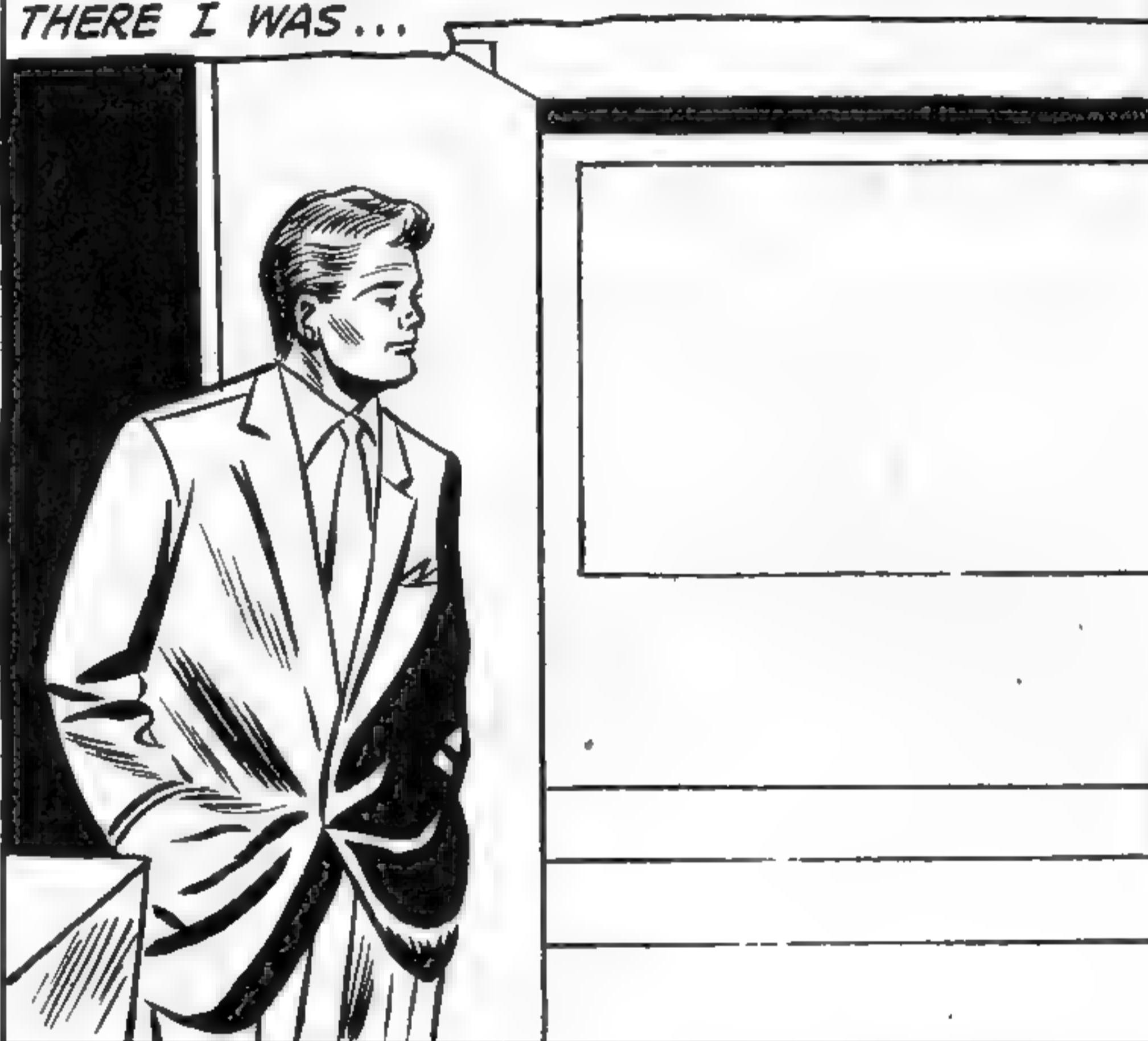
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I DON'T KNOW WHAT I EXPECTED TO SEE INSIDE THE STORE... BUT IT WAS NOTHING...

WHAT KIND OF A GAG IS THIS...



AGAIN THAT STRANGE, COMPELLING FEELING... I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO GO INSIDE... BUT YET THERE I WAS...



HE CERTAINLY WASN'T A SALESMAN... NO HIGH PRESSURE SELLING... BUT HE HAD HIS LINE DOWN PAT...

I ASSUME IT'S THE MIRROR... THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND, YOU KNOW!

HUH—OH NO, JUST LOOKING, THAT'S ALL!



I DIDN'T STAY LONG... JUST ENOUGH TO CONVINCE ME THAT THE MAN IN THE SHOP WASN'T ALL THERE...

HE REALLY BELIEVES IT WORKS... REALLY BELIEVES IT!



BUT I HAD MORE IMPORTANT THING TO WORRY ABOUT
THEN... HELEN... WAS SHE SERIOUS... I HAD TO FIND OUT...

I'LL CALL HER...
IT'S THE ONLY WAY!



NO! BETTER NOT! SUPPOSE SHE
TELLS ME WE'RE THROUGH... I-I
COULDN'T TAKE IT! BUT WHAT AM
I GOING TO DO?



I DIDN'T PLAN IT THAT WAY... BUT A SHORT TIME
LATER I FOUND MYSELF IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR...

WONDER IF IT WORKS
...WONDER IF IT WORKS!

JOE'S DINER



THEN I WAS INSIDE... LISTENING TO THE OWNER...

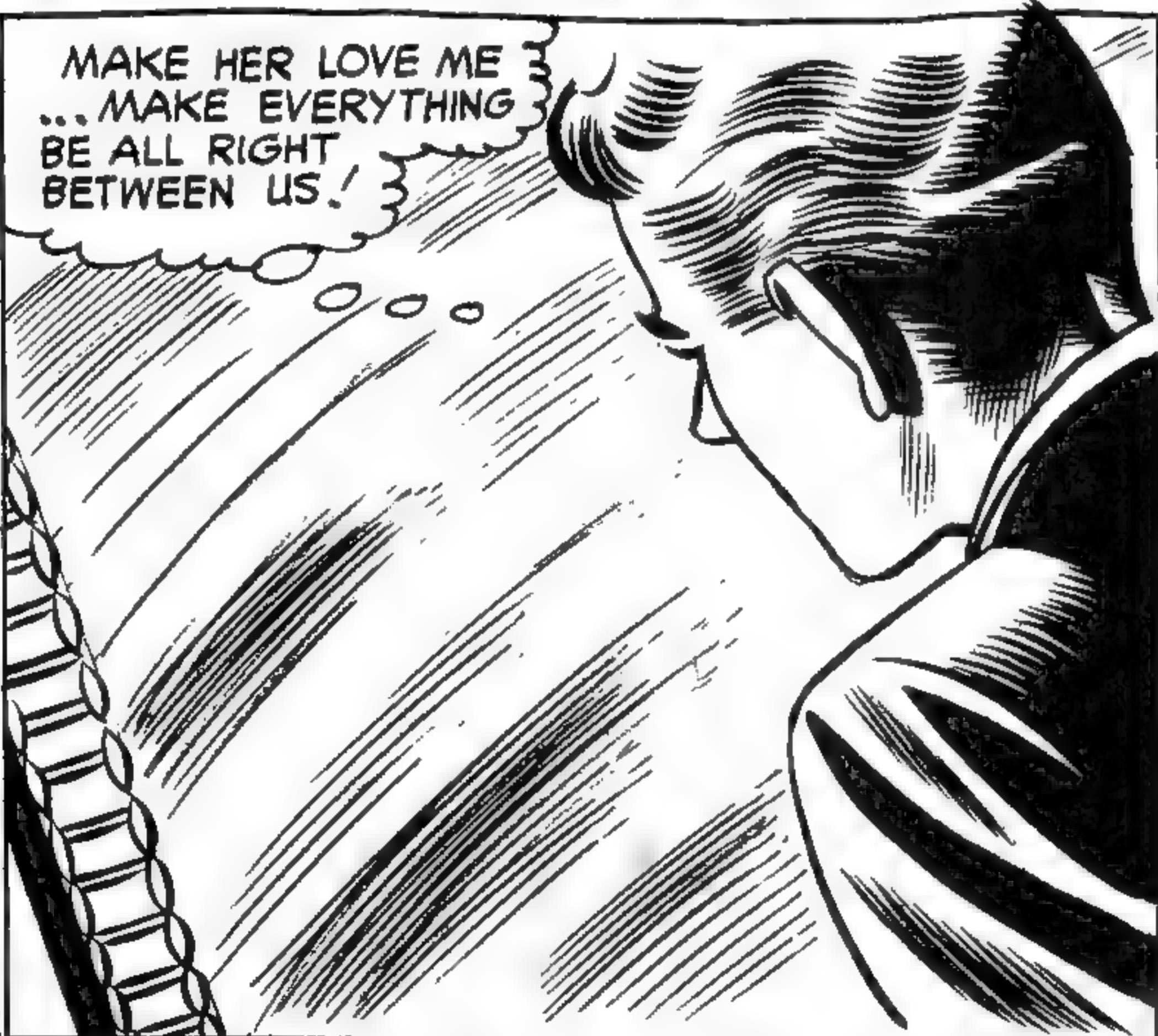
GO AHEAD... USE IT...
I LIKE YOU... YOU
OUGHT TO HAVE A
CHANCE AT IT!

HUH -- THANKS...
MAYBE I WILL!



I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO LOSE, DID I... WHAT
WOULD YOU HAVE DONE? AND SO I STOOD THERE
MAKING MY WISH INTO THE GLASS OF THE MIRROR...

MAKE HER LOVE ME
... MAKE EVERYTHING
BE ALL RIGHT
BETWEEN US!



THANKS A
LOT, MISTER...

THINK NOTHING OF IT... USE
IT ANYTIME YOU WANT!



I RETURNED TO MY APARTMENT FEELING LIKE A FOOL... WHY DID I KEEP ON KIDDING MYSELF...



BUT IT WASN'T ONE OF THE BOYS... IT WAS-WAS HELEN!



WE CELEBRATED THAT NIGHT... AND I ALMOST TOLD HER ABOUT THE MIRROR THEN...



I WALKED HER HOME... SURE OF MY LOVE AGAIN... BUT THINKING OF THE WISHING MIRROR... THE MIRROR THAT MIGHT HAVE BROUGHT THIS ALL ABOUT...



THE NEXT DAY A FRIEND APPEARED IN MY OFFICE... AN EAGER FRIEND...

WHAT A DEAL! THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME! THEY'RE ALL SET TO BRING THOSE OIL WELLS IN... IF YOU INVEST IT NOW, YOU CAN STILL GET IN ON IT! JUST FIVE THOUSAND IS ALL YOU NEED!



BUT YOU'LL TRIPLE IT... THIS IS A CHANCE OF A LIFETIME... DON'T MUFF IT, PHIL!

GOTTA THINK ABOUT IT... GIVE ME A FEW HOURS!



IT WAS THE CHANCE I HAD ALWAYS DREAMED
ABOUT...A REAL KILLING...BUT ALL MY SAVINGS...

CAN START MY OWN BUSINESS...
GET MARRIED...I'LL DO IT!



AND I DID IT! I WITHDREW ALL MY SAVINGS BE-
FORE I HAD A CHANCE TO CHANGE MY MIND!

THAT CLOSES OUT
THE ACCOUNT!

DON'T WORRY...I'LL
REOPEN IT SOON...
WITH SOME REAL MONEY!



I DON'T KNOW HOW IT HAPPENED...BUT SUDDENLY
THERE IT WAS...THE MIRROR!

I WONDER...
I WONDER...



I FELT THE MONEY IN MY POCKET...ALL I HAD...
A LIFE'S SAVINGS...

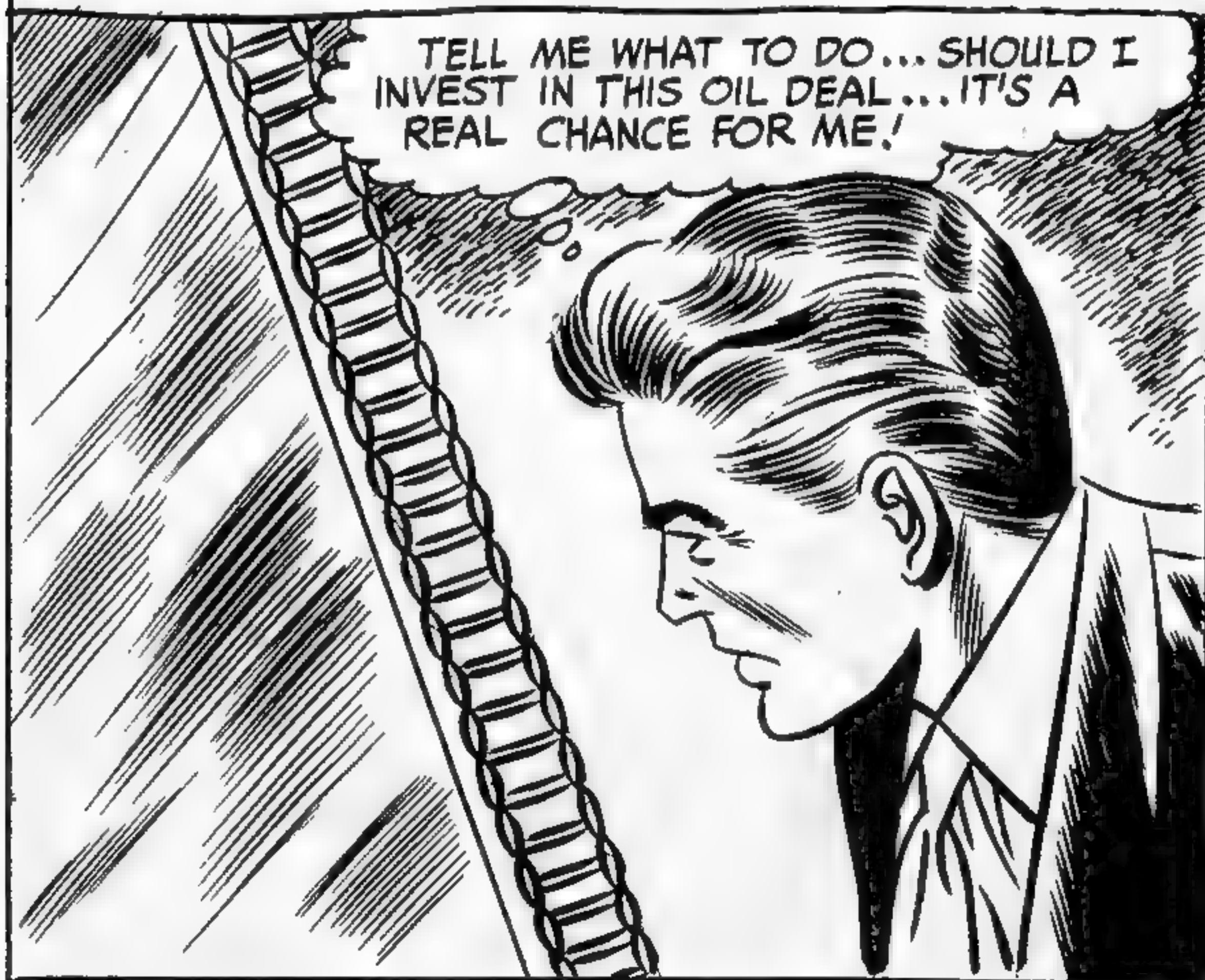
GO AHEAD...LIKE I
SAID, I LIKE YOU...
USE THE MIRROR!

BUT I - I
THANKS!



MAYBE IT DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING...BUT IT HAD WORKED
BEFORE...MAYBE IT WOULD AGAIN...

TELL ME WHAT TO DO...SHOULD I
INVEST IN THIS OIL DEAL...IT'S A
REAL CHANCE FOR ME!



I FELT SILLY AS I LEFT THE SHOP...BUT
I DIDN'T LOSE ANYTHING...MIGHT EVEN
SAVE SOMETHING BY DOING IT...

THANKS...THANKS
A LOT!

SURE THING...
ANYTIME!



I HEARD THE NEWS WHILE I WAITED FOR CHARLEY... WAITED SO THAT I COULD HAVE GIVEN HIM MY MONEY...

THE FBI HAVE JUST CRACKED DOWN ON A GANG OF CONFIDENCE MEN USING A PHONY OIL DEAL TO FLEECE THE PUBLIC... HEAD OF THE GANG IS A MAN NAMED CHARLEY GREENE!

THE MIRROR / IT WORKED! / IT WORKED!



I HAD THE MONEY WITH ME... THAT WAS ALL I NEEDED... PLUS THE FACT THAT IT HAD WORKED TWICE FOR ME... HADN'T FAILED ME...

JUST WRAP IT... I HAVE A CAR TO TAKE IT IN!

OF COURSE! I KNEW YOU'D BE BACK... AND YOU WON'T REGRET IT! THE ONLY ONE OF ITS KIND! YOU'RE A LUCKY MAN!



WE MARRIED RIGHT AFTER THAT... AND THOUGH HELEN DIDN'T LIKE THE PLACE OF HONOR I GAVE TO THE MIRROR, SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING...

IT'S MY-MY LUCKY CHARM... WITHOUT THIS MIRROR, THERE MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN ANY WEDDING!

WELL, THEN: BY ALL MEANS HANG IT THERE!



A FEW DAYS LATER I FOUND MYSELF NEAR THE SHOP... BUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED?

WHERE IS HE... WHERE'S THE MAN WHO RAN THIS SHOP?

WE'RE TAKING CARE OF HIM... I'M LOOKING FOR THE FELLA HE SWINDLED!



SWINDLED?

YEAH... HE'S A CONFIDENCE MAN FROM CHICAGO... COULDN'T MISS... A CHANCES OF A WISH COMING TRUE WERE EVEN... EITHER YES OR NO... HOW COULD HE LOSE?



UNDERSTAND SOME SUCKER BOUGHT A MIRROR... SURE WOULD LIKE TO FIND OUT WHO IT WAS... GUY MIGHT BE GETTING HIS HOPES UP TOO HIGH!

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT!

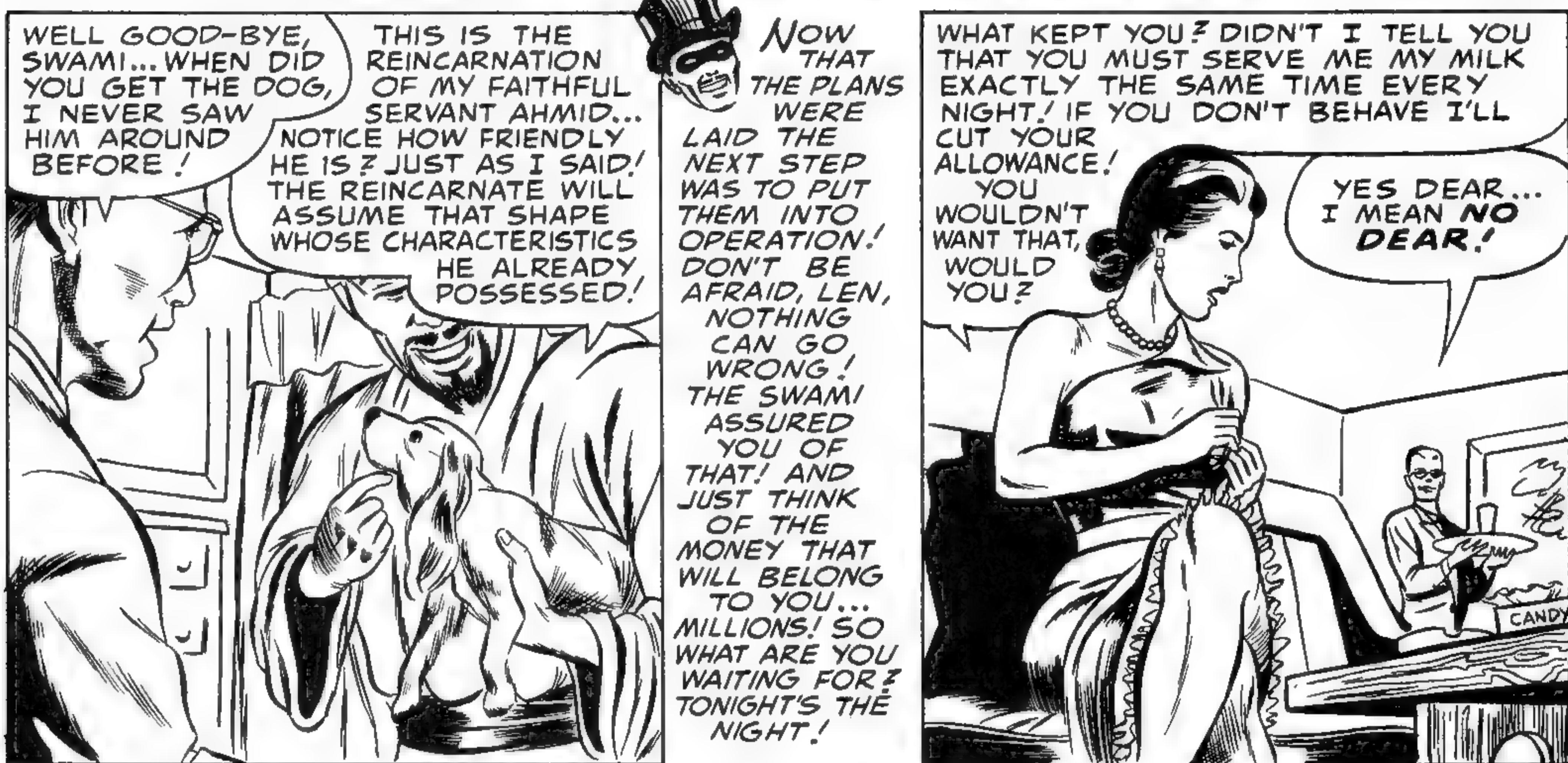
HE COULD TELL THE POLICEMAN... BUT WHY SHOULD HE... WHY SHOULD HE...? The END



SHE SURE IS BEAUTIFUL, ISN'T SHE? BUT THAT'S NOT WHY YOU MARRIED HER, IS IT? IT WAS FOR HER MONEY. HER WEALTH! BUT WHAT DID SHE SEE IN YOU.. YOU'RE... YOU'RE A NOTHING!

SHE WAS IMPRESSED, THAT'S WHY! YOU'RE A WRITER AND SHE LIKED THE IDEA... THAT IS, IN THE BEGINNING SHE DID! NOW SHE HAS NO USE FOR YOU.. TREATS YOU LIKE DIRT! AND YOU TAKE IT... BECAUSE THE NEARNESS OF MONEY MAKES A MAN SWALLOW HIS PRIDE!

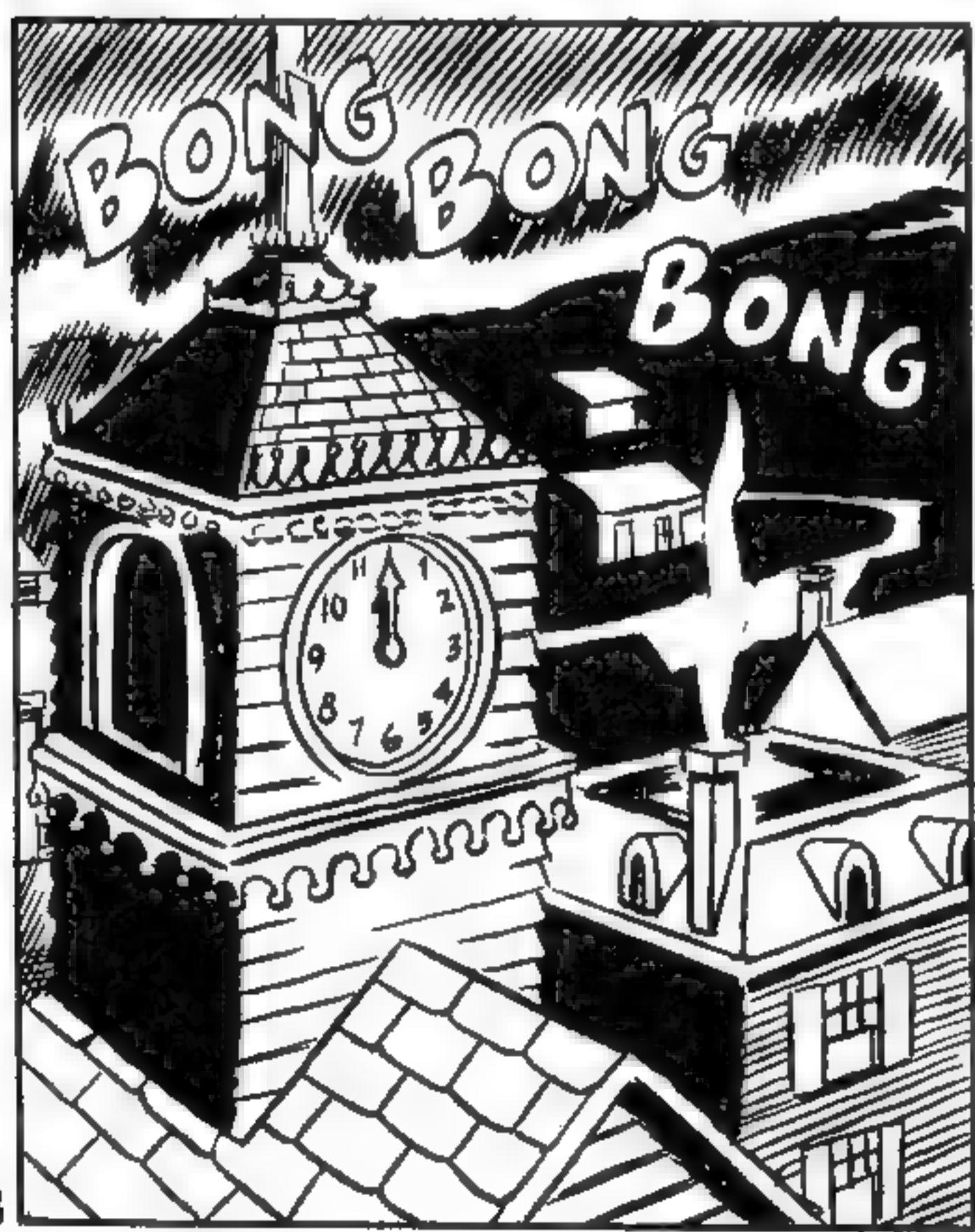




SOMEWHERE IN THE CITY A CLOCK STRUCK MIDNIGHT AND SMALL VAMPIRE-LIKE FIGURES FLITTED AGAINST THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT...

...AND IN THE GRAVEYARD MYSTERIOUS SHADOWS DARTED AMID THE BROKEN TOMB-STONES... AS IF WAITING FOR SOMETHING... OR SOMEONE...

...SUDDENLY A DOG BAYED AT THE MOON... AN OMEN OF DEATH... FOR THERE WAS A MURDER BEING COMMITTED!



AND SO IT
WAS DONE! THE RESULTS
WERE JUST AS YOUR
SWAMI SAID...
THE UNTRACEABLE
POISON AND THE VERDICT
OF HEART FAILURE! NOW
IT WAS ALL OVER... THE MONEY WAS
YOURS... NO MORE ALLOWANCE,
NO MORE BEING ORDERED
AROUND.. LIFE
WAS ONCE MORE WORTH
LIVING!



THEN CAME THE FUNERAL! YOU WERE PROPERLY OVERCOME WITH GRIEF... ENOUGH FOR PEOPLE TO BELIEVE IN YOUR DESPAIR ANYWAY...

ASHES TO ASHES...



FINALLY THE OTHERS LEFT! AND YOU WERE ALONE! THE PEOPLE THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO BE ALONE WITH GLORIA... AND YOU DID... TO GLOAT!

WELL I OUTSMARTED YOU, DIDN'T I? FINALLY PUT ONE OVER ON YOU! HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW THAT YOUR WEAK KNEED HUSBAND FINALLY GOT THE BEST OF YOU!



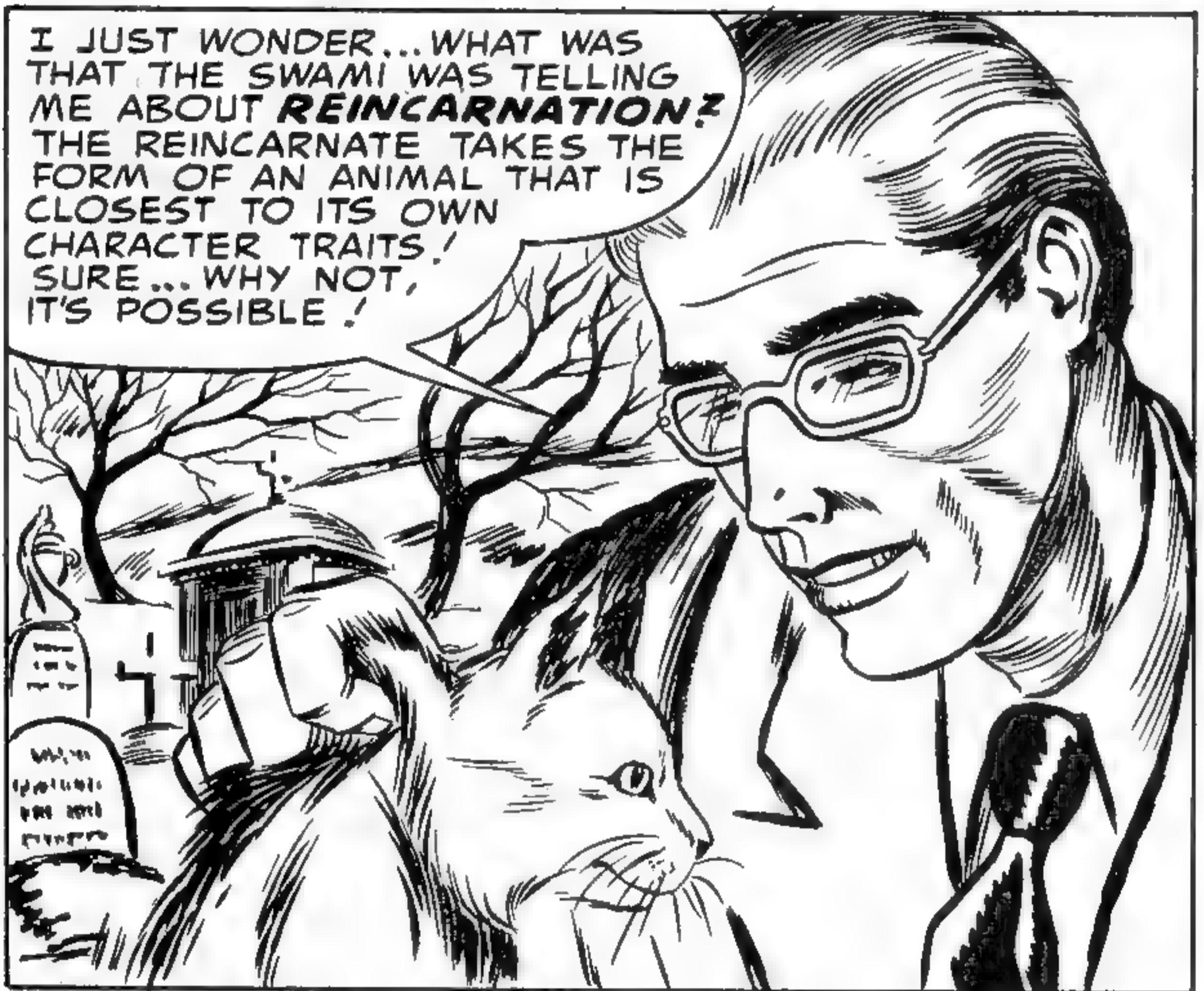
AND THEN...

A CAT! WHERE'D

YOU COME FROM?
FUNNY, I DIDN'T SEE YOU
BEFORE! YOU JUST SEEM TO
HAVE DEVELOPED FROM
MID-AIR!



I JUST WONDER... WHAT WAS THAT THE SWAMI WAS TELLING ME ABOUT REINCARNATION? THE REINCARNATE TAKES THE FORM OF AN ANIMAL THAT IS CLOSEST TO ITS OWN CHARACTER TRAITS! SURE... WHY NOT, IT'S POSSIBLE!



OF COURSE... SLINKY... SVELTE... HER LOVE FOR MILK... HER CLAW-LIKE NAILS... WHY SHOULDN'T GLORIA TURN INTO A CAT!



WHY YOU LITTLE DEVIL,
TRY AND SCRATCH ME,
WILL YOU! NOW I'M SURE IT'S GLORIA... THAT'S JUST HER WAY OF SHOWING HER HATE FOR ME!



AND SO LEN TOOK THE CAT HOME WITH HIM... BACK TO THE MANSION WHERE HE COULD MAKE UP FOR ALL THOSE YEARS OF SUFFERING AT GLORIA'S HAND! NOW THE SHOE WAS ON THE OTHER FOOT... AND HE WAS WEARING IT THIS TIME!

C'MON GLORIA... YOU'RE GONNA WATCH ME ENJOY THIS POOL! YOU NEVER LET ME USE IT BEFORE... BUT YOU'RE NOT STOPPING ME NOW!

WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU... WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF? OOH, NOW I KNOW WHY YOU NEVER USED THE POOL... CATS ARE AFRAID OF WATER, AREN'T THEY!



AND THE LIMIT HAD BEEN REACHED ... IT WAS A SNARLING, ANGRY BALL OF FUR THAT LEAPED AT ITS ANTOGONIZER ... AND RAKED ITS SHARP TALON-LIKE CLAWS DEEP INTO HIS NECK TEARING OUT CHUNKS OF FLESH AND BLOOD!



AND IN SPITE OF THE PRECAUTIONS YOU TOOK POISONING SET IN... EVEN IN DEATH, GLORIA STILL AFFECTED YOUR LIFE !

AND THE CRISIS CAME... AND PASSED... AND YOU WERE DEAD!



AND NOW YOU HAVE BEEN REINCARNATED! WHAT WAS IT THAT THE SWAMI SAID...



...OH YES, THAT THE REINCARNATE SHALL ASSUME THE SHAPE DICTATED BY THE CHARACTER TRAITS OF THE INDIVIDUAL...



...WHICH MEANS YOU... WITH YOUR TRAITS... ARE A MOUSE!



HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN URGE TO DO SOMETHING BIG OR DARING OR SHOCKING... SOMETHING THAT WOULD MAKE PEOPLE TAKE NOTICE OF YOU? THEN YOU CAN PROBABLY UNDERSTAND THE EMOTIONS THAT WERE INVOLVED WHEN ROBBY ANNOUNCED

I KILLED MARY



ROBBY HAD ALWAYS BEEN A SLOW, AWKWARD CHILD... NONDESCRIPT IN APPEARANCE... COMPLETELY LACKING IN PERSONALITY... HE WAS SO QUIET THAT HIS FOLKS OFTEN FORGOT THAT HE WAS AROUND...

COME ON, KENNY, ALBERT, SUSAN... WE'RE GOING DOWN TO THE LAKE!... OH, AND YOU TOO, ROBBY!



OTHER CHILDREN HARDLY EVER INCLUDED HIM IN THEIR GAMES BECAUSE HE WAS NEVER MUCH GOOD AT ANYTHING...

HOW ABOUT ROBBY? AH... WE DON'T NEED HIM... HE ALWAYS DROPS THE BALL!



AND SO ROBBY GREW INTO ADOLESCENCE... LEFT OUT... UNWANTED... IGNORED...

COME ON, MARY, I'LL BUY YOU A SODA!

YEAH... LET'S ALL GO!

MARY WAS THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN SCHOOL... ALSO THE WILDEST. BOYS TRIPPED OVER EACH OTHER TO GET NEAR HER, BUT ROBBY JUST LOOKED ON FROM A DISTANCE... TOO SHY TO APPROACH HER... WATCHING HER... DESIRING HER... HATING HER!

ONE RAINY DAY, ROBBY SAW MARY WALKING HOME ALONE. SOMEWHERE HE FOUND A SPARK OF COURAGE...

CAN I HOLD YOUR UMBRELLA FOR YOU, MARY?

HUH, OH, SURE, ROBBY. YOU STARTLED ME!

THEY STROLLED ALONG IN SILENCE, AND AS THEY WALKED, A PLAN BEGAN TO FORM IN ROBBY'S MIND...

LET'S TAKE A SHORT CUT... THROUGH MAXWELL'S FARM!

OKAY!

HAD IT BEEN ANY ONE OF THE OTHER BOYS, MARY WOULD HAVE SUSPECTED HIS MOTIVES. BUT ROBBY... WELL, ROBBY WAS SO HARMLESS...

AND SO, WHEN HE SUGGESTED THAT THEY STOP FOR A MOMENT IN MAXWELL'S BARN, SHE DIDN'T EVEN HESITATE. ROBBY WATCHED HER AS SHE STRETCHED OUT IN THE HAY...





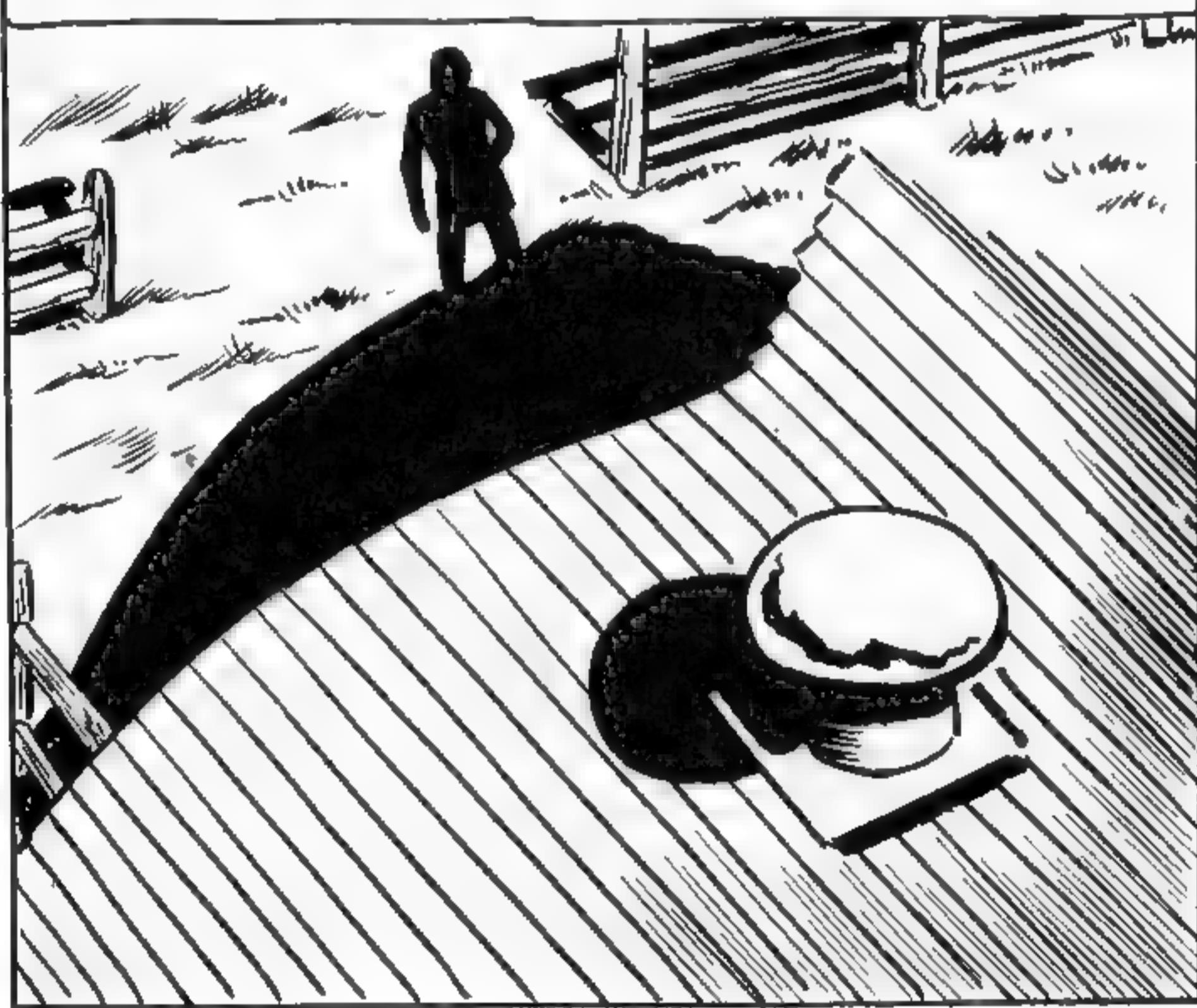
BLINDED BY FRUSTRATION AND FURY, HE SWUNG THE AXE AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN...



AND THEN LIMP AND TREMBLING HE STARED DAZEDLY AT WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN MARY CONWAY...

I KILLED HER! I KILLED HER! I'M GLAD!

AS HE LEFT THE SCENE OF HIS CRIME, ROBBY FELT NO REMORSE OR REVULSION AT WHAT HE HAD DONE... ONLY A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT... OF SATISFACTION! HE, ROBBY, HAD DONE SOMETHING THAT NO OTHER BOY IN TOWN WOULD HAVE DARED TO DO!



HE ARRIVED HOME IN A GLOW OF TRIUMPH... BUT HIS MOTHER'S FIRST WORDS TO HIM PUT A DAMPER ON HIS ELATION...

YES, MOTHER.

ROBBY, HELP SUSAN SET THE TABLE. WE'RE HAVING DINNER SOON... AND PLEASE TRY NOT TO BREAK ANYTHING!



I SAW YOU CARRYING MARY CONWAY'S BOOKS THIS AFTERNOON, ROBBY... I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD IT IN YOU. SHE'S A VERY PRETTY GIRL.

NOT ANY MORE, SHE ISN'T!





AND ROBBY REALIZED SUDDENLY THAT IT HAD ALL BEEN IN VAIN. THEY REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THE THING THAT HE HAD DONE... EVEN THE SHOCK OF MURDER COULD NOT MAKE THEM SEE...



WHEN ROBBY DIDN'T RETURN HOME THAT NIGHT, HIS FAMILY BECAME WORRIED. THE NEXT MORNING THEY WENT LOOKING FOR HIM. SOMEONE REMEMBERED HIS MENTIONING MAXWELL'S BARN...



THERE THEY FOUND HIM...



THEY ALSO FOUND MARY...



THE POLICE CALLED IT A CLEAR CASE OF MURDER AND SUICIDE. BUT THEY ATTRIBUTED THE MURDER TO SOME WANDERING MANIAC, AND THE SUICIDE ... WELL, EVERYONE AGREED THAT ROBBY MUST HAVE BEEN SECRETLY IN LOVE WITH MARY, AND WHEN HE DISCOVERED HER BODY... WELL, IT MUST HAVE BEEN TOO MUCH FOR HIS SENSITIVE NERVES...



AND SO ROBBY, WHO WANTED DESPERATELY TO BE RECOGNIZED FOR SOME DEED OF DARING WAS CHEATED EVEN UNTO THE GRAVE... FOR EVERYONE KNOWS THAT ROBBY COULDN'T HURT A FLY!

THE END

THIS IS A FISH STORY AND LIKE MOST TALES OF THIS SORT, IT'S ABOUT A GREAT FISHERMAN'S SKILL WITH A ROD AND REEL-- AND, AS USUAL, IT'S ALSO ABOUT...

The one that got away!



IF ANY MAN COULD BE CALLED A FISHING FANATIC, THAT MAN WAS OTTO HARBOR. HIS COLLECTION OF MOUNTED, STUFFED FISH WAS SURPASSED ONLY BY MUSEUMS. OTTO WAS TRULY A MASTER OF THE ROD AND REEL...

AND THIS ONE I CAUGHT OFF THE COAST OF FLORIDA ... GOT THIS TROPHY FOR IT.

WHEW! WHAT A MONSTER! MUST HAVE GIVEN YOU QUITE A BATTLE!



YOU'VE DEVOTED YOUR WHOLE LIFE TO FISHING, OTTO -- WHY?

RALPH, EVERY MAN FEELS THE DESIRE TO EXCEL IN SOMETHING ... TO BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE. SOME MEN CHOOSE TO MASTER THE ARTS... OTHERS CHOOSE SCIENCE... I HAVE FOUND FAME AS A FISHERMAN...!



BUT ENOUGH TALK... IT'S GROWING LATE, AND WE HAVE TO GET UP VERY EARLY. TOMORROW, MY FRIEND, I WILL SHOW YOU THE FINEST STREAM FOR FISHING IN THE ENTIRE WORLD!

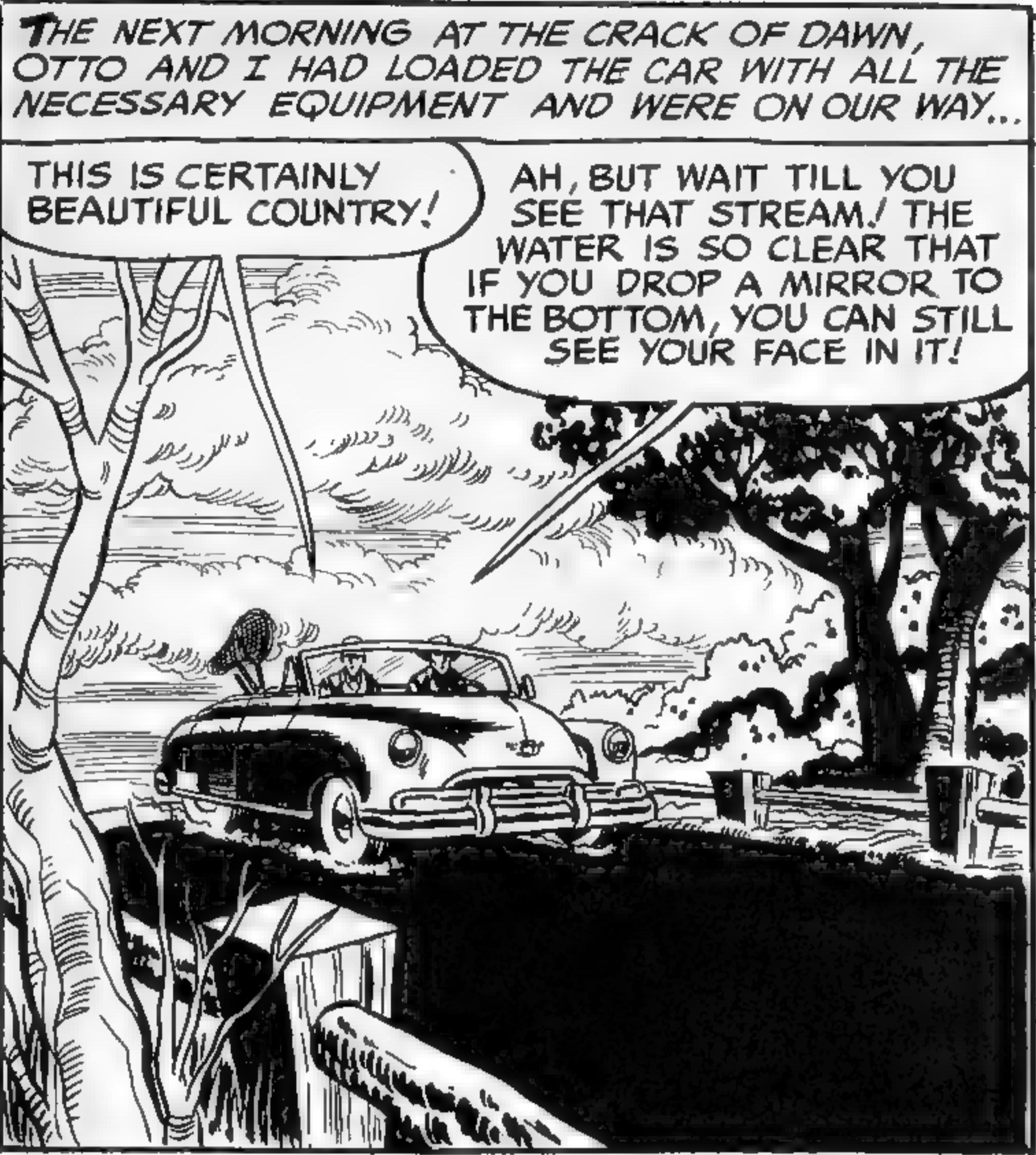


THE NEXT MORNING AT THE CRACK OF DAWN,
OTTO AND I HAD LOADED THE CAR WITH ALL THE
NECESSARY EQUIPMENT AND WERE ON OUR WAY...

THIS IS CERTAINLY
BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY!

AH, BUT WAIT TILL YOU
SEE THAT STREAM! THE
WATER IS SO CLEAR THAT
IF YOU DROP A MIRROR TO
THE BOTTOM, YOU CAN STILL
SEE YOUR FACE IN IT!

HERE WE ARE, RALPH!
PURAQUA SPRING! A
FISHERMAN'S PARADISE!



IT MARVELLED AT THE ENTHUSIASM
HE DISPLAYED AS HE DONNED HIS
GEAR AND LED ME OUT INTO THE
THIGH-DEEP WATER. HIS FACE
EXPRESSED SHEER ECSTASY AS HE
CAST HIS LINE INTO THE QUICK-
MOVING STREAM ...

ALL RIGHT,
YOU SCALY CREATURES
... YOUR TIME HAS
COME... OTTO
HARBOR IS HERE!



I LOOKED DOWN AND THE WATER WAS JUST AS OTTO HAD SAID... CRYSTAL CLEAR. EVERY PEBBLE ON THE BOTTOM SHONE BRIGHT AND CLEAN. A LARGE PICKERAL SWAM BY RIGHT BENEATH ME AND MOVED IN OTTO'S DIRECTION ...



I TURNED TO MENTION IT TO OTTO, BUT HE WAS ENgrossed BY SOMETHING IN THE WATER.



I CALLED SEVERAL TIMES, BUT OTTO SEEMED LIKE A MAN IN A HYPNOTIC TRANCE... STARING DAZEDLY INTO THE WATER. I MOVED TOWARD HIM TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD SO ENRAPT HIS ATTENTION...

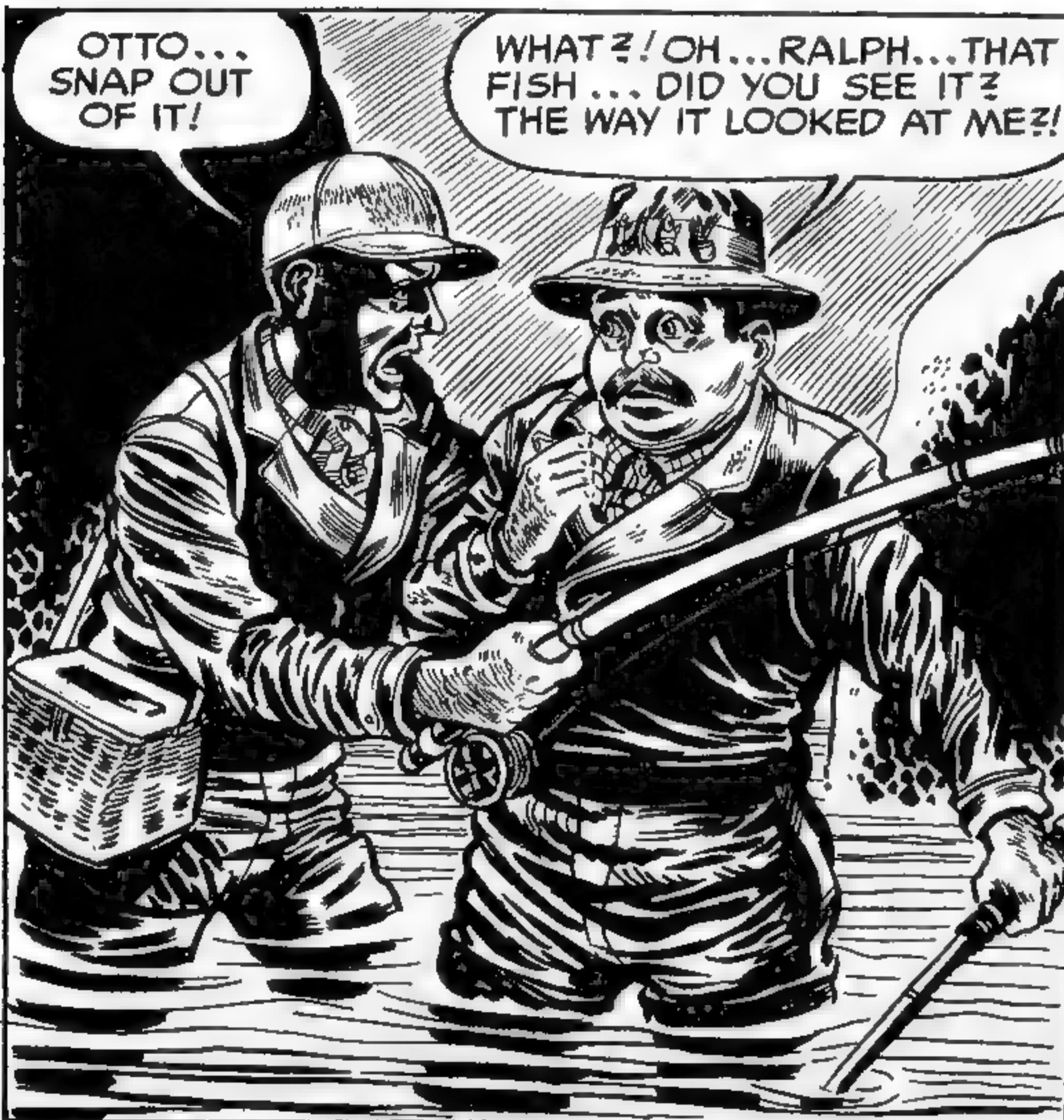


IT WAS A FISH... FLOATING MOTIONLESS JUST BE-NEATH THE SURFACE... ITS LARGE GLASSY EYES FIXED ON OTTO! IT WAS POSITIVELY EERIE!



OTTO... SNAP OUT OF IT!

WHAT? OH... RALPH... THAT FISH... DID YOU SEE IT? THE WAY IT LOOKED AT ME?!



IT'S STILL THERE! QUICK-- MY NET! I'LL GET HIM!



HE LIFTED HIS NET AND WAS ABOUT TO SWING IT THROUGH THE WATER...



THERE WAS UNMISTAKABLE FEAR ON OTTO'S FACE.
HE WAS AWESTRUCK... THE NET DROPPED FROM HIS
FINGERS. JUST THEN SOME INTUITION MADE ME LOOK
AROUND...



HUNDREDS OF FISH OF EVERY DESCRIPTION WERE
MOVING TOWARDS US... ALL SEEMED TO WEAR
THAT SAME, WIDE, ACCUSING STARE...



AND THEN THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF THEM... MILLIONS
... COMING FROM EVERY DIRECTION... CLOSING IN...
SURROUNDING US...



BUT MY CRIES FELL ON DEAF EARS... I COULD WAIT NO
LONGER! PANIC-STRICKEN, I FOUGHT MY WAY TOWARD
SHORE... PULLING MY LEGS WITH DIFFICULTY THROUGH
THE SLIMY WALL OF MILLING, THRASHING FISH!...



THE WATER GREW THICKER AND THICKER AS MORE AND MORE FISH CLOSED IN. THEY PRESSED AGAINST MY BODY... PUSHING ME THIS WAY AND THAT... PINNING ME DOWN BY THEIR SHEER MASS AND WEIGHT!



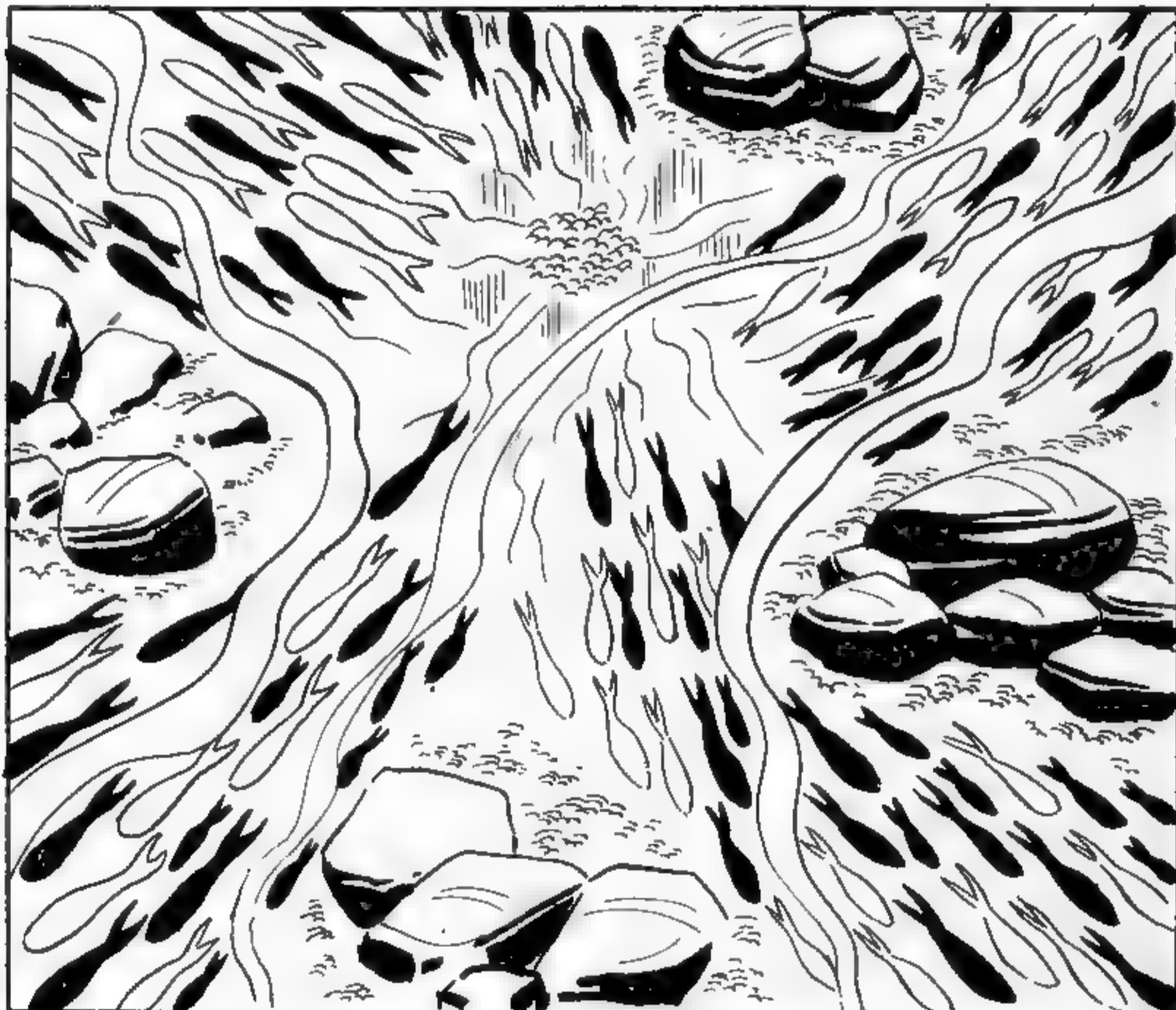
WITH A LAST DESPERATE LUNGE I MANAGED TO REACH SAFETY... I TURNED TO SEE WHAT I COULD DO FOR OTTO, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE! I WATCHED IN TERROR AS THE SLIMY CREATURES PULLED HIM DOWN, DOWN INTO THEIR WILD, THRASHING MIDST...



HIS CRIES ENDED IN A HORRIBLE GURGLE AS I GAZED HELPLESSLY AT THE SPOT WHERE HE HAD DISAPPEARED...



AND THEN SUDDENLY, THE MILLIONS OF FISH BROKE IN ALL DIRECTIONS AWAY FROM THAT FATAL SPOT. IN LESS THAN THREE MINUTES, THEY HAD VANISHED COMPLETELY...



...LEAVING NOTHING BUT A WHITE SKELETON TO WHICH CLUNG STRANDS OF FLESH THAT HAD ONCE BEEN OTTO HARBOR, MASTER FISHERMAN! I STARED AT THE GRUESOME SIGHT IN UTTER FASCINATION...



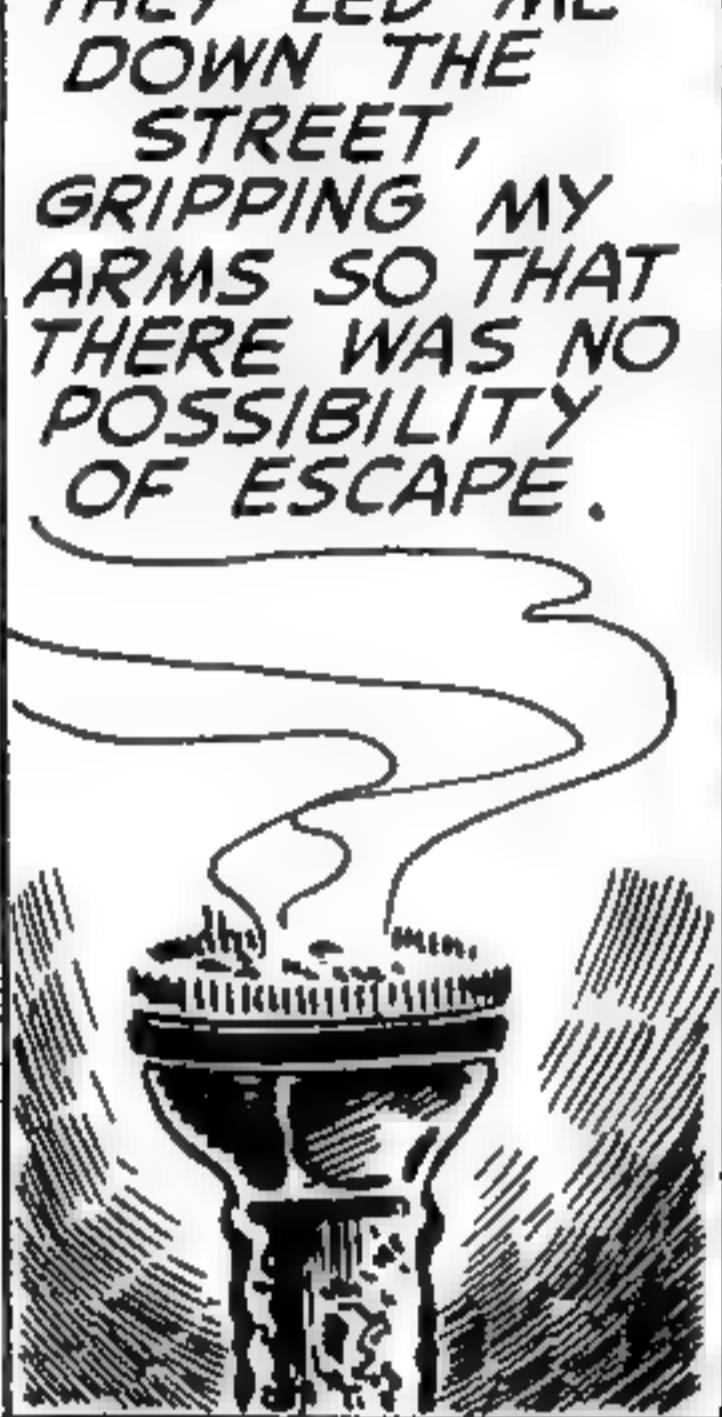
...AND THEN I LAUGHED... GREAT, GASPING, HYSTERICAL PEALS OF LAUGHTER THAT RANG THROUGH THE FOREST AND ECHOED BACK IN MY EARS. IT WAS FUNNY... SO TERRIBLY FUNNY... FOR THIS WAS A TALE TOLD BY A FISH, AND I WAS THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY!





THEIR COLD,
MENACING
SILENCE ONLY
HEIGHTENED MY
TERROR AS
THEY LED ME
DOWN THE
STREET,
GRIPPING MY
ARMS SO THAT
THERE WAS NO
POSSIBILITY
OF ESCAPE.

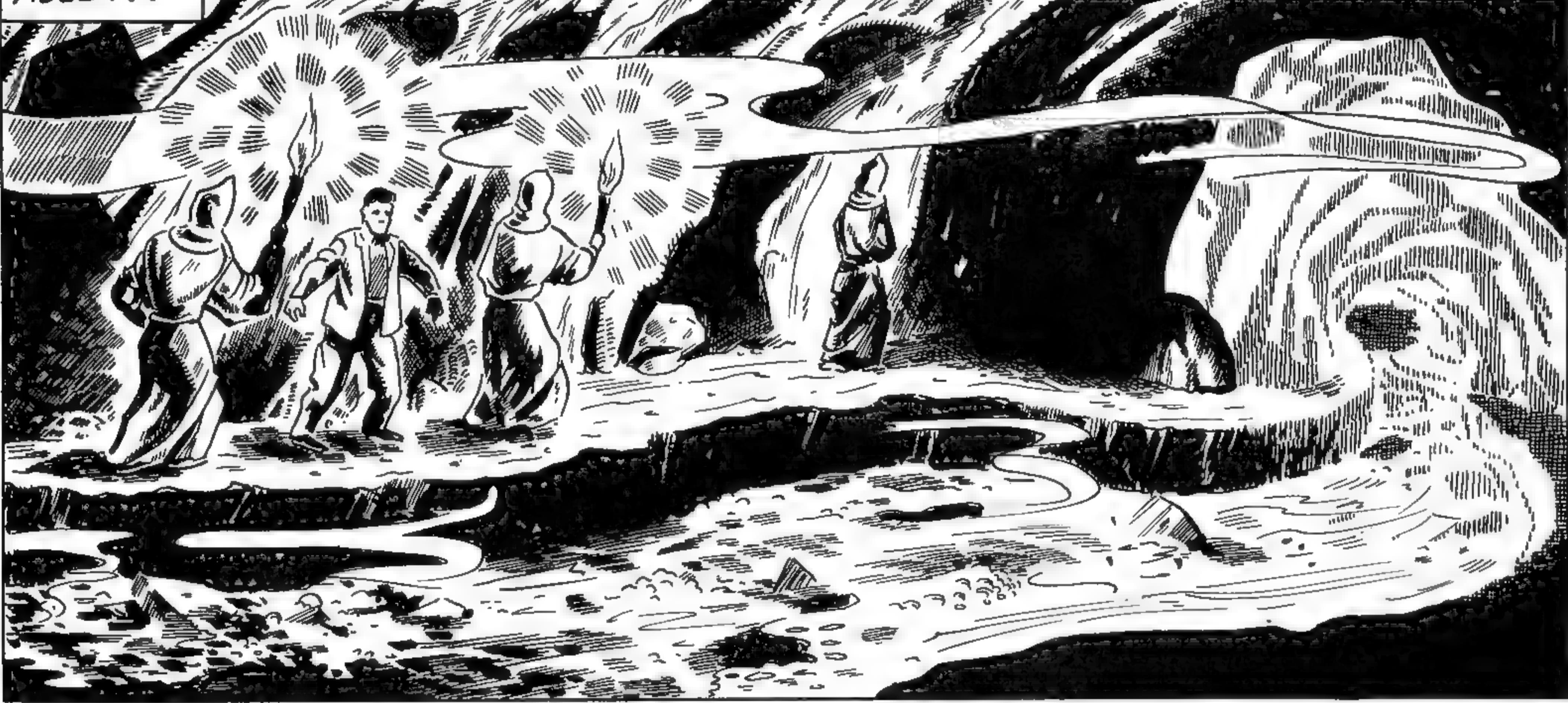
THEY STOPPED AT A MAN-HOLE AND ONE OF MY MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANTS PRIED UP THE COVER WITH A CROWBAR...



ONE OF THEM DESCENDED INTO THE BLACK HOLE, AND THEN I WAS THROWN ROUGHLY AFTER HIM...



THEY MARCHED ME ALONG A SERIES OF TWISTING, WINDING TUNNELS THROUGH WHICH RAN RIVERS OF SLIME AND FILTH FROM THE CITY'S SEWAGE. THE STENCH WAS UNBEARABLE...



AT TIMES THE PATH WAS SO PRECARIOUS THAT I WAS CERTAIN I COULD PROCEED NO FURTHER... BUT MY CAPTORS WERE INTENT UPON KEEPING ME ALIVE FOR WHATEVER HORRIBLE PURPOSE THEY HAD IN MIND...



AT LAST THE CAVERN TURNED SHARPLY AND WE WERE STANDING BEFORE A HUGE STEEL DOOR UPON WHICH ONE OF THE HOODED FIGURES RAPPED A SIGNAL...



THE DOOR OPENED WIDE AND I WAS NEARLY SHOCKED OUT OF MY SENSES AT WHAT I SAW...



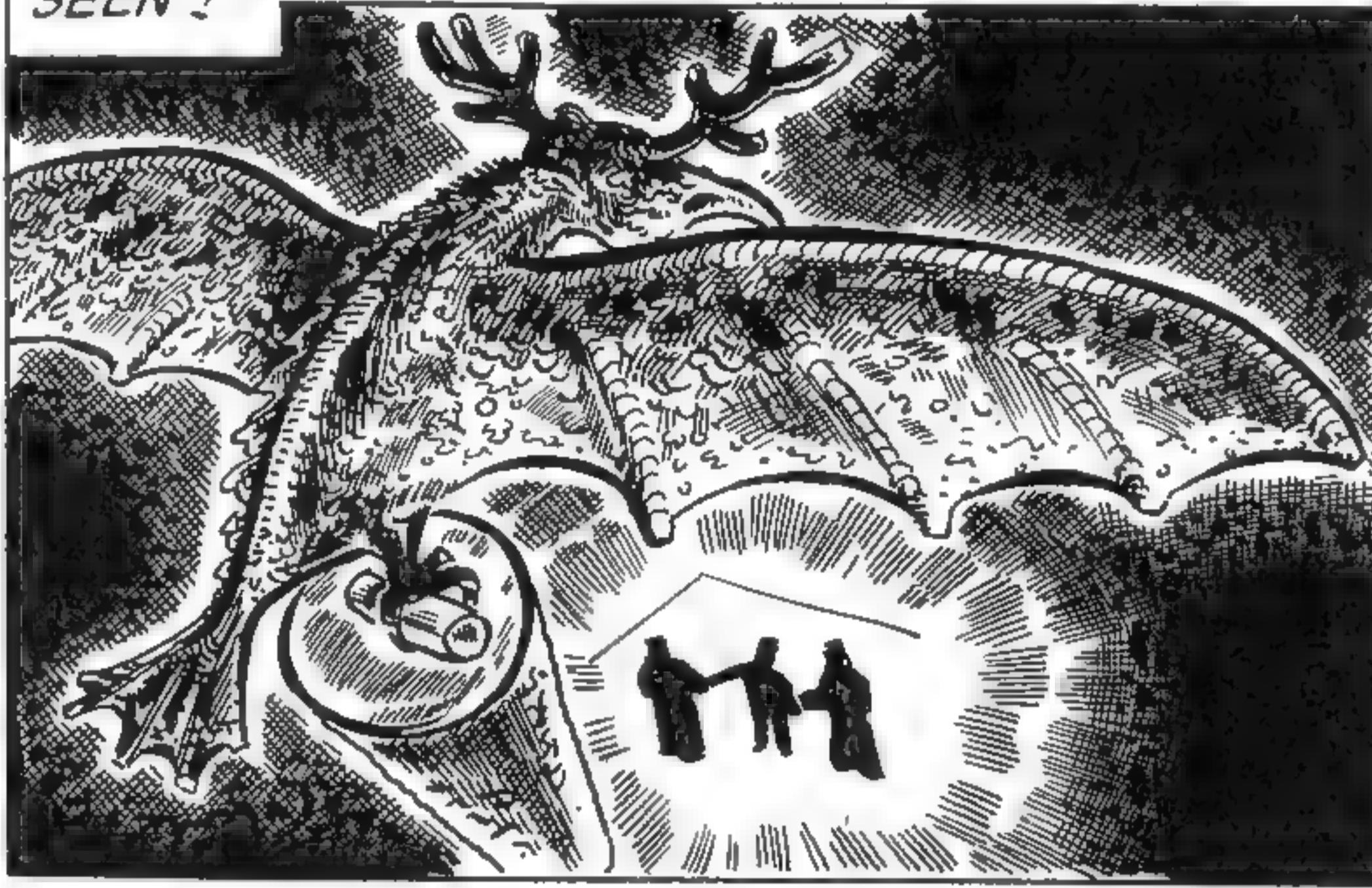
A HUNDRED PAIR OF HOSTILE EYES WERE FIXED UPON ME AS I WAS LED DOWN THE AISLE TO THE LARGE STONE ALTAR BEHIND WHICH STOOD A TALL, BEARDED MAN IN WHITE ROBES. THERE WERE NO SHOUTS OR CURSES... ONLY A DEATH-LIKE SILENCE...



BY THIS TIME I WAS TOO PARALYZED WITH FEAR TO THINK STRAIGHT... IN A DAZE I FELT MYSELF BEING FORCED TO MY KNEES. THE WHITE-ROBED PRIEST RAISED HIS ARMS AND FROM THE HOODED AUDIENCE THERE ROSE A WEIRD HUMMING... IT GREW AND SWELLED AND CHANGED KEY... RISING AND FALLING IN A TERRIBLE, TUNELESS CACOPHONY OF SOUND...



THE CHANTING CEASED ABRUPTLY AND I WAS DRAGGED FROM THE ALTAR TO A TALL PILLAR, ENGRAVED WITH STRANGE CARVINGS. AT THE TOP OF THE PILLAR WAS PERCHED A STATUE OF THE MOST HORRIBLE BEAST I HAD EVER SEEN!



MY CLOTHES WERE REMOVED, LEAVING ME STARK NAKED EXCEPT FOR A SACK-CLOTH WHICH THEY TIED ABOUT MY WAIST...



MY QUESTION WAS SOON ANSWERED... THEY BOUND ME TO THE PILLAR AND THE CEREMONY BEGAN. THE LASH DESCENDED AGAIN AND AGAIN, AND EACH TIME I CRIED OUT IN PAIN, THE CROWD SENT UP AN ANSWERING MOAN IN IMITATION. THERE WAS NO MOCKERY OR DERISION IN IT... IT WAS AS THOUGH MY SCREAMS WERE A PART OF THEIR CHANT. IT WAS GHASTLY!



I CAN'T RECALL HOW LONG THE WHIPPING LASTED... I WAS ON THE VERGE OF FAINTING WHEN IT STOPPED, BUT MY RELIEF TURNED TO HORROR AS THEY TURNED ME ABOUT AND TIED ME AGAIN TO THE PILLAR...



THERE WAS AN UNHOLY SILENCE AS THE BRAND WAS BROUGHT CLOSER AND CLOSER TO MY FOREHEAD. THE POUNDING OF MY OWN HEART SEEMED TO BE THE ONLY SOUND IN THE ROOM. WHEN THE WHITE HOT STEEL TOUCHED MY FLESH, I SCREAMED ONCE... AND THEN LOST CONSCIOUSNESS...



BUT MY TORMENTORS DID NOT LEAVE ME IN MY WELCOME OBLIVION... THEY REVIVED ME AND PROCEEDED TO STRAP ME TO THE ALTAR. WHAT FIENDISH TORTURES THEY HAD YET IN MIND, I COULD NOT THEN IMAGINE...



BUT THEN... LOOKING UPWARD FROM MY PROSTRATE POSITION, MY EYES BEHELD THE MOST HORRIBLE OF ALL POSSIBLE HORRORS. THE BIRD WHICH I HAD THOUGHT TO BE A STATUE SUDDENLY FLAPPED ITS HUGE, BAT-LIKE WINGS, AND WITH A BLOOD-CURDLING SHRIEK, FLEW FROM ITS PERCH AND BEGAN TO DESCEND UPON ME...



I WINCED IN PAIN AS THOSE SHARP CLAWS SANK INTO MY ARM... I SCREAMED IN MORTAL AGONY AS THE AWFUL CREATURE BEGAN TEARING PIECES OF FLESH FROM MY BODY... MY FACE... MY ARMS...



AS I SANK INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS ONCE MORE, I WAS SURE THAT MY EYES WOULD NEVER AGAIN SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY...



BUT I DID AWAKEN... IMAGINE MY ASTONISHMENT AT FINDING MYSELF LYING ON THE GROUND, FULLY CLOTHED, IN FRONT OF THE ALLEY WHERE MY CAPTORS HAD FIRST SEIZED ME. SUDDENLY I BEGAN TO LAUGH, AND THE ECHO OF MY VOICE REVERBERATED LOUDLY THROUGH THE EMPTY STREETS...



I'M ALIVE... MY CLOTHES... I MUST HAVE FAINTED AND DREAMED THE WHOLE THING... AHHAHAHAHAHA

SO YOU SEE... THERE IS NO NEED TO BE ALARMED. NONE OF IT REALLY HAPPENED... IT WAS ALL A TERRIBLE DREAM!



The End



WHY COULDN'T SHE UNDERSTAND... WHY DIDN'T SHE UNDERSTAND!

I'D DO ANYTHING FOR WEALTH... ANYTHING...

IT WAS STRANGE, HENRY DIDN'T HEAR THE CREATURE ENTER... BUT SUDDENLY...

WHAT TH- WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

NEVER MIND THAT NOW.. DID I HEAR YOU SAY YOU'D DO ANYTHING FOR WEALTH... WELL, MY FRIEND, I CAN GIVE YOU THAT WEALTH... BUT YOU MUST DO SOMETHING FOR ME! SELL A LITTLE GEM THAT I HAVE!

STOLEN PROPERTY, EH! NO, I WOULDN'T DO ANYTHING ILLEGAL!

NO, THIS BELONGS TO ME! WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO IS TO SELL IT FOR ME... AND YOU KEEP THE MONEY! I'LL SEND YOU THE CUSTOMERS... FOR THEY SHALL RETURN IT TO ME!

HENRY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE DEAL, IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE! BUT WHAT DID HE HAVE TO LOSE... NOTHING!

WHY, I'D BE CRAZY NOT TO ACCEPT AN OFFER LIKE THAT! IS THAT THE STONE YOU WANT SOLD... WHY, IT'S A RUBY! BEAUTIFUL TOO! NEVER SAW ANYTHING LIKE IT!

RUBY... HMM, A BETTER NAME WOULD BE A **BLOODSTONE**! NOW REMEMBER... YOU KEEP THE MONEY... I'LL SEND YOU THE CUSTOMERS!

THE STRANGER VANISHED LEAVING THE RUBY WITH HENRY... IT WAS A STRANGE GLOWING SORT OF A GEM... HENRY WAS RIGHT, HE HAD NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE!

WHY... IT'S WARM... PULSATING... IT'S AS IF IT WERE ALIVE!

THE DAYS PASSED AND HENRY FORGOT ABOUT THE STONE... FORGOT UNTIL ONE DAY!

I WAS TOLD YOU HAVE A CERTAIN RUBY RING FOR SALE! I MUST SEE IT!

RUBY RING? OH YES.. JUST ONE MOMENT PLEASE!

HENRY BROUGHT OUT THE RUBY... THE BLOODSTONE... WHAT DID HE HAVE TO LOSE!

YES, THIS IS THE ONE! I'LL TAKE IT! THIS SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO COVER IT!

HUH! OH YES, THAT SHOULD BE AMPLE! I'M SURE YOU'LL BE VERY PLEASED WITH THE GEM!



THE GIRL TOOK THE RING AND LEFT...SHE WORE IT THAT NIGHT...FOR A RING LIKE THAT WAS MEANT TO BE WORN! AND WHEN SHE WENT TO SLEEP, THE RUBY WAS STILL ON HER FINGER...STILL WARM..PULSATING!

THE HOURS PASSED AND THE RING GLOWED BRIGHTER.. EVER BRIGHTER...AND THEN FROM OUT OF THE DARKNESS!

SLEEP MY BEAUTY...ETERNAL SLEEP! BUT YOU WON'T NEED THIS ANY MORE! HA! HA! HA!



THEY FOUND THE GIRL THE NEXT MORNING...LIFELESS.. AND STRANGELY...

BLOODLESS! THE BLOOD HAS BEEN DRAINED FROM HER BODY!

OH NO... WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS... WHAT COULD HAVE DONE THIS!



HENRY ALSO RECEIVED A VISITOR THAT MORNING...ONE HE WELCOMED...HE DIDN'T ASK ANY QUESTIONS...ALL HE WAS INTERESTED IN WAS THE RUBY...THE BLOOD-STONE!

YOU HAVE IT! REMEMBER OUR DEAL?

YES, MY GREEDY FRIEND, I HAVE IT! AND I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN OUR DEAL! THE MONEY IS YOURS...THE CUSTOMERS MINE...EH...EH...EH...



THE MONTHS PASSED, AND THE CUSTOMERS APPEARED, AND THAT WAS THE LAST HENRY SAW OF THEM...BUT THE STRANGE FATE BEFELL THEM ALL...THE BEAUTIFUL RING...DEATH...BLOODLESS CORPSES...AND THE APPEARANCE OF THE STRANGE CREATURE HOVERING IN THE BACKGROUND!



AND AS THE TIME PASSED HENRY'S WEALTH INCREASED... NOW HE HAD ACHIEVED HIS DESIRE... HIS AMBITION WAS FULLFILLED ...HE WAS RICH!



WHO CAN SAY WHAT FATE WILL ACCOMPLISH... FOR A FEW DAYS LATER...

HOW DID THAT FUNNY LITTLE MAN KNOW I NEEDED A NEW RING! AND WHY DID HE SEND ME TO HENRY'S STORE? WHY... THIS IS JUST THE THING I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR... HENRY WON'T MISS IT...I'LL ONLY WEAR IT TONIGHT... THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH!



YES CYNTHIA, ONE NIGHT WOULD BE ENOUGH! MORE THAN ENOUGH! FOR THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT...



YES, HENRY FINALLY UNDERSTOOD ...AND THE CREATURE REALIZED IT...



HENRY KNEW, AND THERE WAS NO SHOCK WHEN HE LOOKED UP AT THE CREATURE ... THE CREATURE FROM THE GRAVE ... THE VAMPIRE!



ALLEN LANE HAD EVERYTHING A MAN COULD WANT... WEALTH... POSITION... POWER! ANYBODY WOULD HAVE BEEN EAGER TO CHANGE PLACES WITH HIM... AND HE WITH THEM! FOR HE COULDN'T ENJOY ALL THIS WORLDLY SUCCESS... HE WAS BEING FORCED TO RETIRE FROM HIS ACTIVE LIFE BECAUSE OF A BAD HEART... IN SHORT HE HAD A...

BUA TICKER!



BUT, YOU'VE GOT TO
HELP ME... WE CAN'T GIVE
UP NOW! I'LL MAKE YOU
A RICH MAN IF YOU
CURE ME!

I'M SORRY,
MR. LANE...
THERE IS NO
CURE!

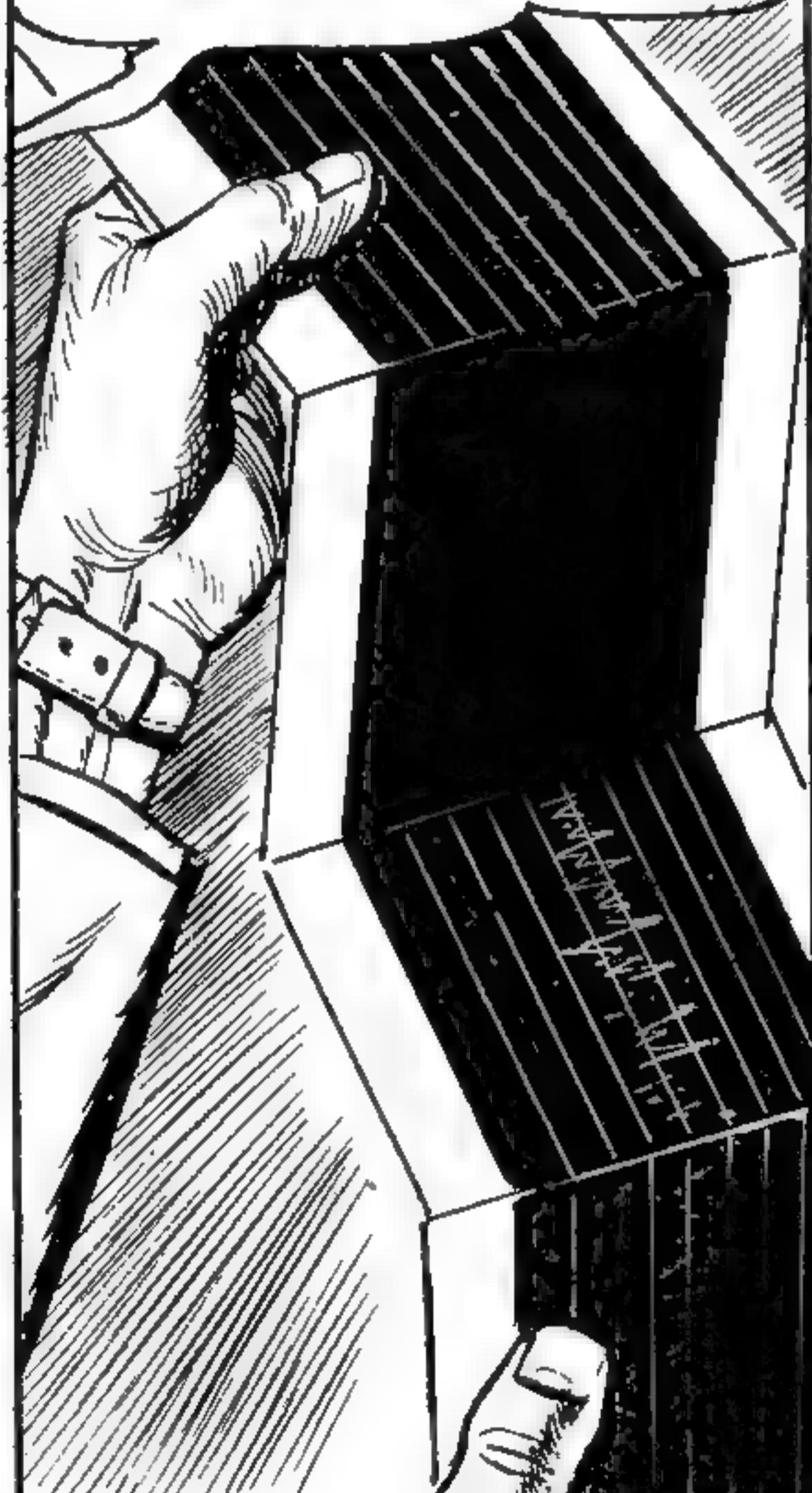
WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU CAN'T
DO ANYTHING FOR ME? YOU'RE
THE BIGGEST SPECIALIST IN THE
COUNTRY! IF YOU CAN'T DO
ANYTHING FOR ME, WHO CAN?

LOOK AT YOUR CARDIO-
GRAPH... YOU'RE LIVING
ON **BORROWED TIME**,
MR. LANE!

WHAT DOES
THAT MEAN?
THAT I
CAN POP
OFF ANY
SECOND?

DON'T TAKE IT
LIKE THAT, SON.
OF COURSE,
YOU'LL HAVE TO
CUT OUT ALL
YOUR ACTIVITIES,
BUT WITH PROPER
REST AND CARE
YOU'LL PROBABLY
OUTLIVE ME!

I'M AFRAID
NOBODY CAN...
YOU HAVE A VERY
ADVANCED **HEART
CONDITION!**



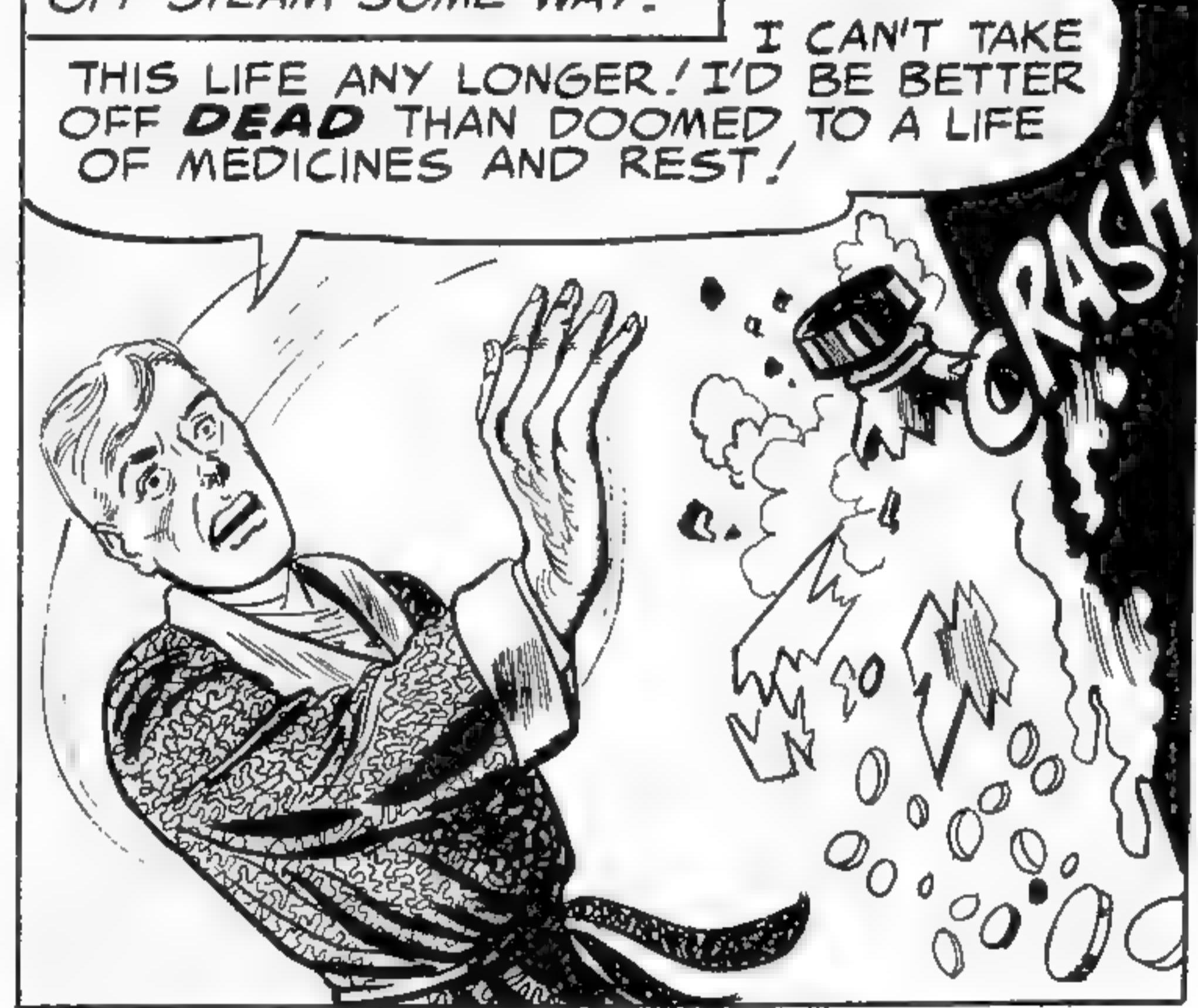
BUT HOW ELSE COULD ALLEN LANE TAKE THE NEWS? HOW DID THE DOCTOR EXPECT A MAN OF HIS DRIVE AND AMBITION TO JUST STOP COMPLETELY? IT WAS LIKE CUTTING OFF HIS RIGHT ARM! TO STOP NOW WAS TO... WELL, TO BE DEAD...



BUT THE DOCTOR WAS RIGHT! WITH THE PROPER REST AND CARE THERE WAS NO TELLING HOW LONG ALLEN LANE COULD LIVE! AND A FEW MONTHS LATER...



HE STARED AT THE SEDATIVE AND THEN ALL THOSE MONTHS OF INACTIVITY SUDDENLY WELLED UP INSIDE HIM... HE HAD TO BLOW OFF STEAM SOME WAY!



THE EMOTIONAL OUTBURST PASSED AND ALLEN SETTLED BACK TO HIS ROUTINE EXISTENCE! A ROUTINE WHICH WASN'T DISTURBED UNTIL HE MET BILL MEAKER, AN OLD FRIEND WHOM HE KNEW TO BE SUFFERING FROM THE SAME ailMENT!



...BUT, HOW! I'VE BEEN TO THE BIGGEST SPECIALISTS... THEY ALL TELL ME A CURE IS IMPOSSIBLE! IF YOU KNOW THE NAME OF ANOTHER DOCTOR YOU'VE GOT TO TELL ME... YOU'VE GOT TO!

WELL, HE'S NOT REALLY A DOCTOR... NOT REALLY! AND I MUST ADMIT HIS METHODS ARE STRANGE... BUT THEY WORK! IF YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU ABOUT HIM I WILL...



ALLEN LANE HAD NO CHOICE! WHAT DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE IF THE METHODS WERE STRANGE... IF THE MAN WASN'T A DOCTOR... IF HE COULD CURE THE **BAD HEART**, THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERED! AFTER ALL, WHAT DID HE HAVE TO LOSE...

THE APPOINTMENT WAS MADE AND ALLEN LANE EAGERLY MADE HIS APPEARANCE AT THE STRANGE OFFICE...

MR. ER, GRAHAM?

YES...AH, I SEE YOU'RE ON TIME, MR. LANE! GOOD, WE CAN GO TO WORK AT ONCE!



YES, YES, JUST AS YOU DESCRIBED...A BAD CONDITION! I CAN FIX YOU UP, BUT AS MR. MEEKER PROBABLY MENTIONED, MY METHODS ARE A BIT OUT OF THE ORDINARY!

I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR METHODS! ALL I'M INTERESTED IN IS GETTING THIS **BUM TICKER** PUT BACK IN SHAPE!



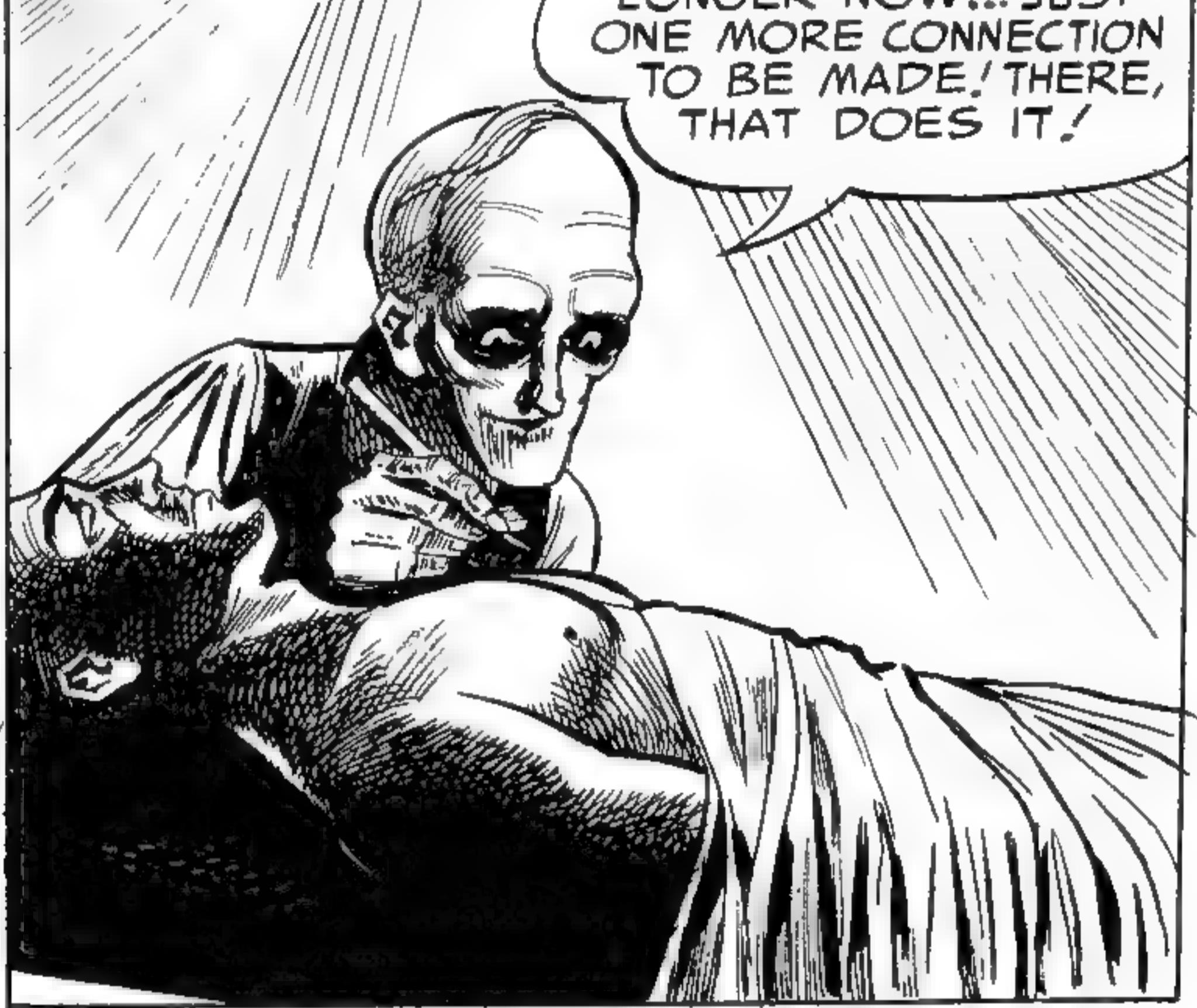
ALLEN LANE WAS WILLING TO SUBMIT TO ANYTHING...AND SO THE STRANGE OPERATION BEGAN! AN OPERATION THAT WAS TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT MEDICAL SCIENCE SAID WAS IMPOSSIBLE!

HMM, YES THAT'S RIGHT...NOW THIS GOES TO THE AORTA...NOW I'VE GOT IT!



HOURS PASSED, BUT STILL THE STRANGE OPERATION CONTINUED...

JUST A LITTLE LONGER NOW...JUST ONE MORE CONNECTION TO BE MADE! THERE, THAT DOES IT!



AND FINALLY IT WAS OVER...

HOW DO YOU FEEL, MR. LANE?

IT IS A STRANGE FEELING... BUT I'LL GET USED TO IT IN TIME! JUST SO LONG

EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT?

AS I'M IN PERFECT SHAPE IS ALL THAT REALLY MATTERS!

WELL, I MUST ADMIT

OF COURSE NOBODY WILL BELIEVE THIS... BUT I AM THE LIVING PROOF THAT YOU'VE CURED MY HEART CONDITION! AT LAST I CAN LIVE AGAIN!

JUST ACT THE WAY YOU ALWAYS DID... YOU HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!

OF COURSE THERE MAY BE THOSE MINOR AD-

JUSTMENTS I TOLD YOU ABOUT...OUTSIDE OF THAT YOUR NORMAL IN EVERY RESPECT... **WELL, ALMOST EVERY RESPECT!**



QUICKLY ALLEN RETURNED TO HIS OLD WAYS... AND WITH A VENGEANCE! ALL THOSE ACTIVITIES THAT HAD BEEN DENIED HIM WERE NOW A THING OF THE PAST!

HOW ABOUT THAT! TWO HUNDRED YARDS RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE OF THE FAIRWAY!

I'D NEVER BELIEVE IT IF I DIDN'T SEE IT WITH MY OWN EYES! A MONTH AGO YOU WERE PRACTICALLY BEDRIDDEN WITH A **BAD HEART** AND LOOK AT YOU NOW... WHY, YOU'RE IN BETTER SHAPE THAN I AM!



THAT WASN'T THE ONLY TYPE OF ACTIVITY THAT ALLEN INDULGED IN... HE WAS OUT TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME!

MORE CHAMPAGNE, BABY! I'VE GOT A LOT OF LIVING TO MAKE UP!

YOU BET... IT SURE IS GOOD TO GO OUT WITH A MAN WHO KNOWS HOW TO LIVE!



LIFE WAS ONCE AGAIN PERFECT TO ALLEN LANE... AND WHY SHOULDN'T IT BE? BUT THEN ONE DAY HE NOTICED SOMETHING STRANGE HAPPENING TO HIS REFLEXES! FOR SOME UNACCOUNTABLE REASON HIS EVERY ACTION WAS SPEEDED UP!



BUT REMEMBERING GRAHAM'S WARNING, HE QUICKLY RETURNED TO THE STRANGE SANATORIUM FOR HIS, ER, ADJUSTMENT!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT... ALL OF A SUDDEN EVERYTHING JUST SPEEDED UP... I WAS RUNNING INSTEAD OF WALKING, READING A BOOK IN HALF AN HOUR... **IT WAS FANTASTIC!**

NOTHING TO GET UPSET ABOUT, MR. LANE! I THOUGHT SOMETHING LIKE THIS MIGHT HAPPEN... JUST TAKE A **MINOR ADJUSTMENT ON YOUR TICKER!**

HMM, JUST AS I THOUGHT... THERE, THAT DOES IT!



TIME PASSED AND IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE WORD OF ALLAN'S COMPLETE RECOVERY GOT BACK TO DR. BISHOP, THE HEART SPECIALIST. IT WAS HARD FOR HIM TO BELIEVE THE MIRACLE, BUT THERE WAS NO QUESTION ABOUT IT...

...AMAZING! COMPLETE RECOVERY! WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THIS, ER, QUACK WHO PERFORMED THE OPERATION?

GRAHAM! I'LL GIVE YOU HIS PHONE NUMBER! ... AND HE'S NO QUACK! HE DID SOMETHING YOU COULDN'T DO... FIXED MY TICKER!



ONCE AGAIN EVERYTHING WAS FINE, EXCEPT A FEW DAYS LATER...

WHAT'S THE MATTER ALLAN? CAN'T YOU KEEP UP WITH ME... YOU'RE WALKING SO SLOWLY!

I... DONT... KNOW... WHAT'S WRONG! I... JUST... CAN'T. SEEM... TO... MOVE... ANY... FASTER! I'VE... JUST... SEEMED... TO... RUN... DOWN...



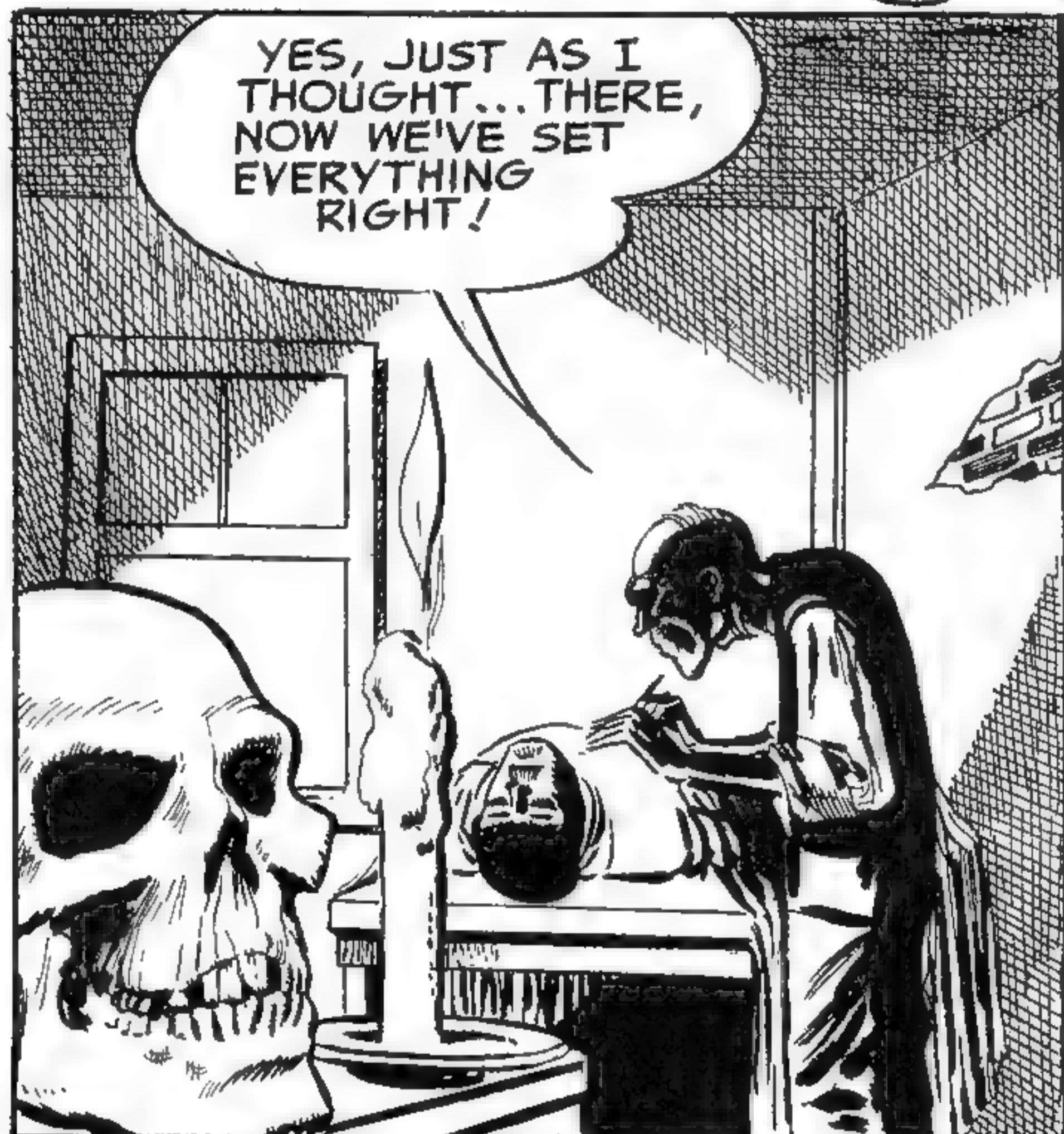
THERE WAS ONLY ONE MAN WHO COULD SOLVE THIS... GRAHAM!

I'M... IN... A... STATE... OF... SLOW... MOTION... EVERYTHING... I... DO... IS... AT... THIS... SLOW... RATE...!

DON'T FRET, MR. ALLAN! I WAS AFRAID I HAD MADE TOO LARGE AN ADJUSTMENT THE OTHER DAY... WE'LL HAVE YOU FIXED UP IN NO TIME AT ALL! YOUR TICKER WILL BE AS GOOD AS NEW!



YES, JUST AS I THOUGHT... THERE, NOW WE'VE SET EVERYTHING RIGHT!



EVERYTHING WAS PERFECT NOW... OR AT LEAST IT SEEMED SO! BUT A FEW DAYS LATER DR. BISHOP RECEIVED A DISASTEROUS PHONE CALL... A STRANGE PHONE CALL!

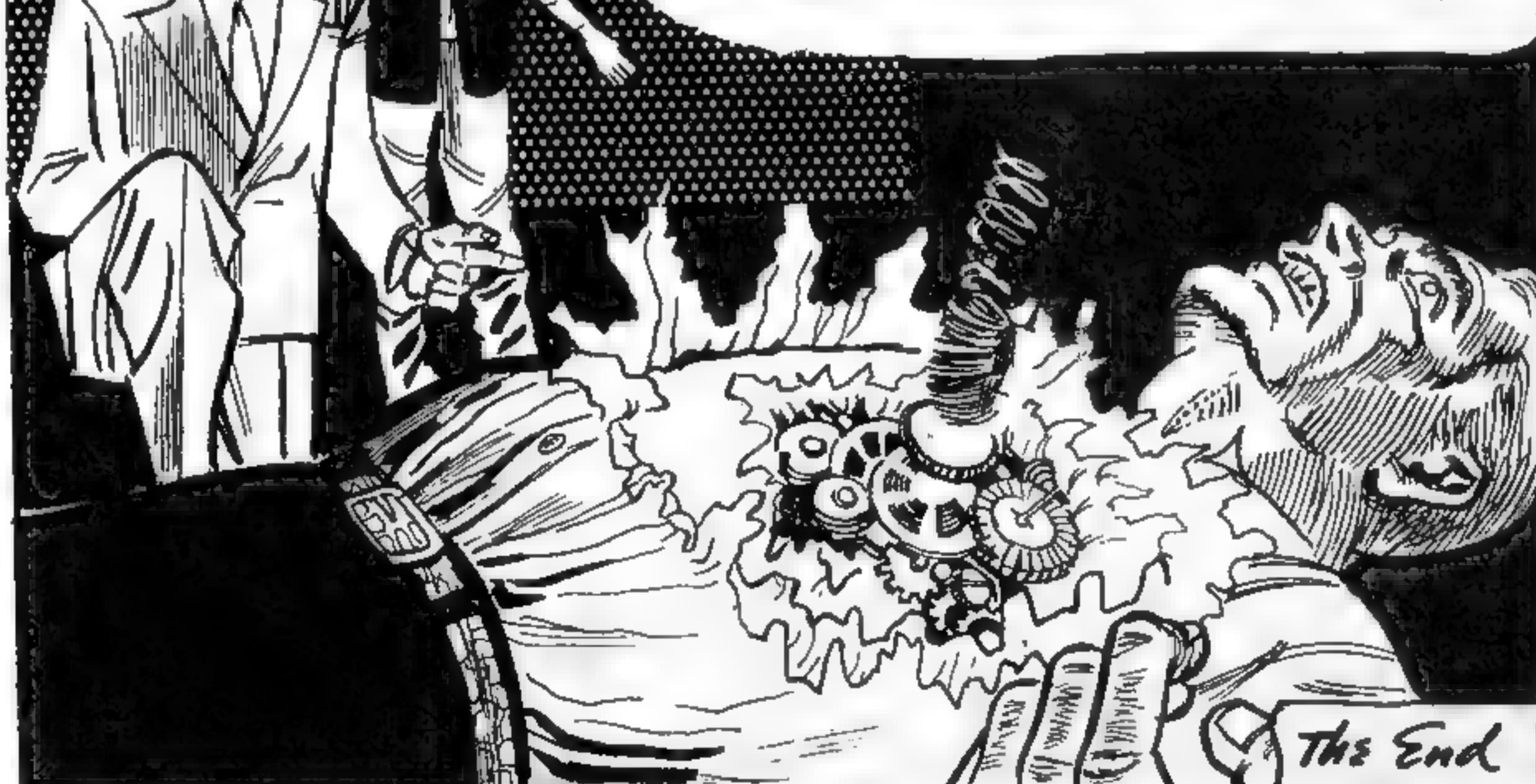
NO! ALLAN LANE DEAD! IT CAN'T BE! AND YOU SAY HIS HEART IS... NO! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! I'LL GET IN TOUCH WITH THAT GRAHAM MAN, MAYBE HE CAN STRAIGHTEN THIS OUT!



A SHORT TIME LATER THE TWO MEN WERE STARING DOWN AT THE STILL FORM OF ALLAN LANE...

NOW WILL YOU EXPLAIN THIS?

I TRIED TO REPLACE HIS BAD HEART WITH A GOOD ONE. GUESS I MADE A MISTAKE THOUGH I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED IT WHEN IT KEPT GOING FASTER AND SLOWER... BUT IT TURNED OUT TO BE A BUM TICKER AFTER ALL!



LIFE INSURANCE

PROTECT YOURSELF! THE OBELISK LIFE INSURANCE CO. OFFERS THE ONLY POLICY OF ITS TYPE IN EXISTANCE, A POLICY THAT PROTECTS THE INSURED AGAINST DEATH! THIS SERVICE IS GUARANTEED OR YOU GET 100 TIMES YOUR MONEY BACK! STEP UP, AND BUY "LIFE INSURANCE"!



GASPER DEMIJOHN, YOUNGEST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE RICHTON NATIONAL BANK, WAS READING THE MORNING PAPER IN HIS OFFICE ONE MORNING WHEN HIS EYE FELL UPON A RATHER CURIOUS ADVERTISEMENT . . .

ROBERTS, DID YOU SEE THIS AD IN THIS MORNING'S PAPER?

WHICH AD IS THAT, MR. D.?



WHY, NO SIR -- AS A MATTER OF FACT, I DON'T BELIEVE THAT AD EVEN APPEARS IN MY PAPER!

STRANGE, ISN'T IT? I THINK I'LL LOOK INTO IT!



THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE AD THAT INTRIGUED CASPER --- THE WORDING --- THE IMPLIED MEANING -- HE HAD TO FIND OUT ---

THIS IS THE PLACE ALL RIGHT!



THE MAN BEHIND THE DESK SEEMED ORDINARY ENOUGH, BUT WHEN HE LOOKED UP, CASPER CAUGHT HIS BREATH! THOSE EYES --- IT WAS LIKE LOOKING INTO THE EMPTY HOLLOWS OF A SKULL ---!

YES, SIR - MAY I HELP YOU?

ER.. YES.. THIS AD IN TODAY'S PAPERS! I'M NOT QUITE SURE I UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS!



IT'S REALLY QUITE SIMPLE-- WE INSURE YOU AGAINST DYING! FOR \$5000 PER YEAR YOU ARE GUARANTEED NOT TO DIE!

THAT IS VERY INTERESTING --- BUT WHAT IF I SHOULD DIE? I COULDN'T VERY WELL ASK FOR A REFUND, COULD I?



SHOULD YOU DIE BEFORE THE INSURED PERIOD, YOUR BENEFICIARY WILL RECEIVE A SUM OF \$500,000 FOR EVERY YEAR PAID FOR AND NOT DELIVERED!

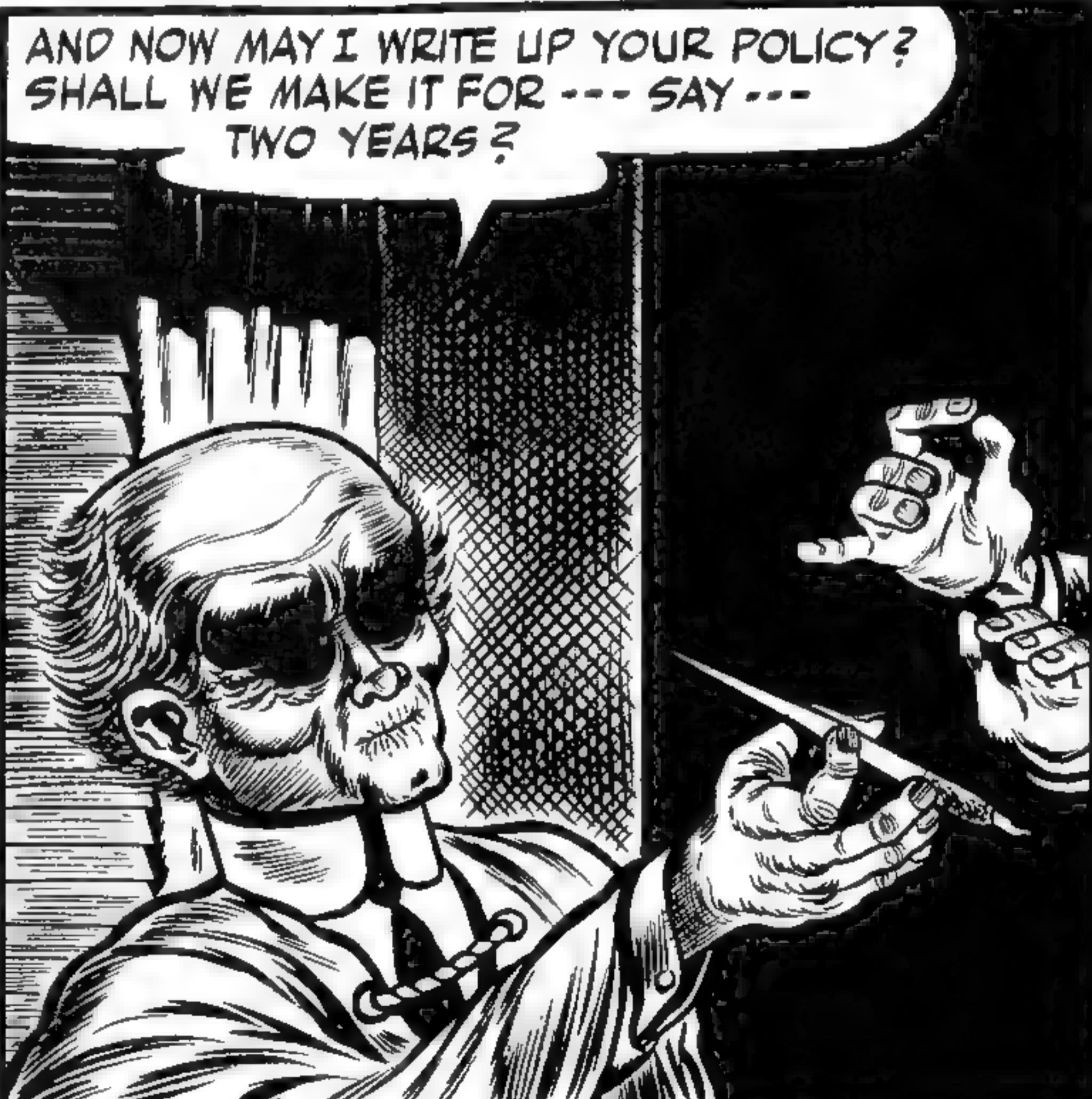


BUT HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE THAT A MAN WON'T DIE DURING THAT PERIOD -- ISN'T IT SOMETHING OF A RISK?

APPARENTLY, MR. DEMIJOHN, YOU STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND JUST HOW WE OPERATE! YOU SEE, IT IS OUR BUSINESS TO PREVENT DEATH.. AND I'M PROUD TO SAY WE HAVE NEVER YET LOST A SINGLE CUSTOMER!



AND NOW MAY I WRITE UP YOUR POLICY? SHALL WE MAKE IT FOR --- SAY --- TWO YEARS?



IT SEEMED INCREDIBLE... A LIFE INSURANCE POLICY THAT PROTECTED THE INSURED INSTEAD OF JUST THE BENEFICIARY! BUT UNBELIEVABLE AS IT APPEARED, CASPER DEMIJON BOUGHT A TWO YEAR POLICY---

I MUST BE A FOOL... THE WHOLE THING IS PROBABLY A HOAX AND I'VE JUST BEEN TAKEN FOR \$10,000!



BUT THE VERY NEXT DAY, CASPER GOT HIS FIRST INKLING THAT THE OBELISK INSURANCE CO. INTENDED TO LIVE UP TO ITS CONTRACT! OKAY... DON'T NOBODY MOVE! THIS IS A STICKUP!



THE BANDITS HAD JUST GONE INTO THE VAULT WHEN CASPER NOTICED THAT THE BANK HAD BECOME UNUSUALLY QUIET! HE WENT TO HIS DOOR --

ROBBERS!.. THEY MUST BE IN THE VAULT... GOT TO ACT FAST!



HE LUNGED FOR THE HEAVY STEEL DOOR AND STARTED TO SWING IT SHUT... THERE WAS A SURPRISED SHOUT--TWO SHOTS RANG OUT-- BUT CASPER CONTINUED PUSHING IT UNTIL THE VAULT WAS CLOSED, SEALING THE GANGSTERS INSIDE --



WHEN THE POLICE ARRIVED, CASPER WAS BLEEDING PROFUSELY FROM A CHEST WOUND, BUT HE WAS STILL ALIVE!

SO THIS IS THE HERO THAT LOCKED THEM IN THE VAULT, EH? BETTER GET HIM TO THE HOSPITAL, RIGHT AWAY, BOYS!



AND THEN, AT THE HOSPITAL -- IT'S THE MOST BAFFLING THING I EVER SAW! THE COURSE OF THE BULLET INDICATES THAT IT MUST HAVE PASSED THROUGH THE HEART... AND YET THE HEART DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE BEEN TOUCHED AT ALL! EXTRA-ORDINARY!



ON THE DAY CASPER WAS RELEASED FROM THE HOSPITAL, THE PERSONNEL WATCHED HIM IN AWE...

THERE HE GOES! HE SURE DOESN'T
LOOK LIKE A MAN WHO JUST
**BARELY ESCAPED
DEATH!**

BUT TO CASPER IT WAS MORE THAN A MERE
FREAK OF NATURE! ---

THIS IS MARVELOUS! WHAT A GLORIOUS
FEELING IT IS TO KNOW WITH ABSOLUTE
CERTAINTY THAT YOU **CANNOT DIE** ...
THAT THERE IS **NOTHING** ON EARTH
THAT CAN KILL YOU! IT'S FANTASTIC!



AND SO CASPER DEMIJOHN BEGAN TO REALLY
LIVE! HE INDULGED IN ACTIVITIES WHICH HE WOULD
ORDINARILY HAVE SHUNNED BECAUSE OF THE
DANGER INVOLVED ... BUT NOW --- HE HAD
NOTHING TO FEAR ... HE HAD
LIFE INSURANCE!

CASPER! BE CAREFUL ... YOU'RE ONLY A
BEGINNER ... YOU'LL KILL YOURSELF!

CASPER WAS SO ELATED OVER THE SENSE OF
FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY THAT HIS INSURANCE
GAVE HIM THAT HE HAD HIS POLICY EXTENDED
TO TEN YEARS ...

EXACTLY \$40,000 ---
I THANK YOU MR.
DEMIJOHN --- AND
GOOD LUCK TO
YOU!

GOOD LUCK? HA HA!
THAT'S VERY GOOD--
I'VE JUST BOUGHT
\$40,000
WORTH!

KILL MYSELF? HA! HA!
I COULDN'T IF
I TRIED!



A WEEK LATER HE WAS DRIVING HOME FROM
A HUNTING TRIP, SPEEDING ALONG AT 80
MILES PER HOUR --- A SHARP CURVE
LOOMED AHEAD --- HE APPLIED
HIS BRAKES ---

THE
BRAKES! SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH THE BRAKES!



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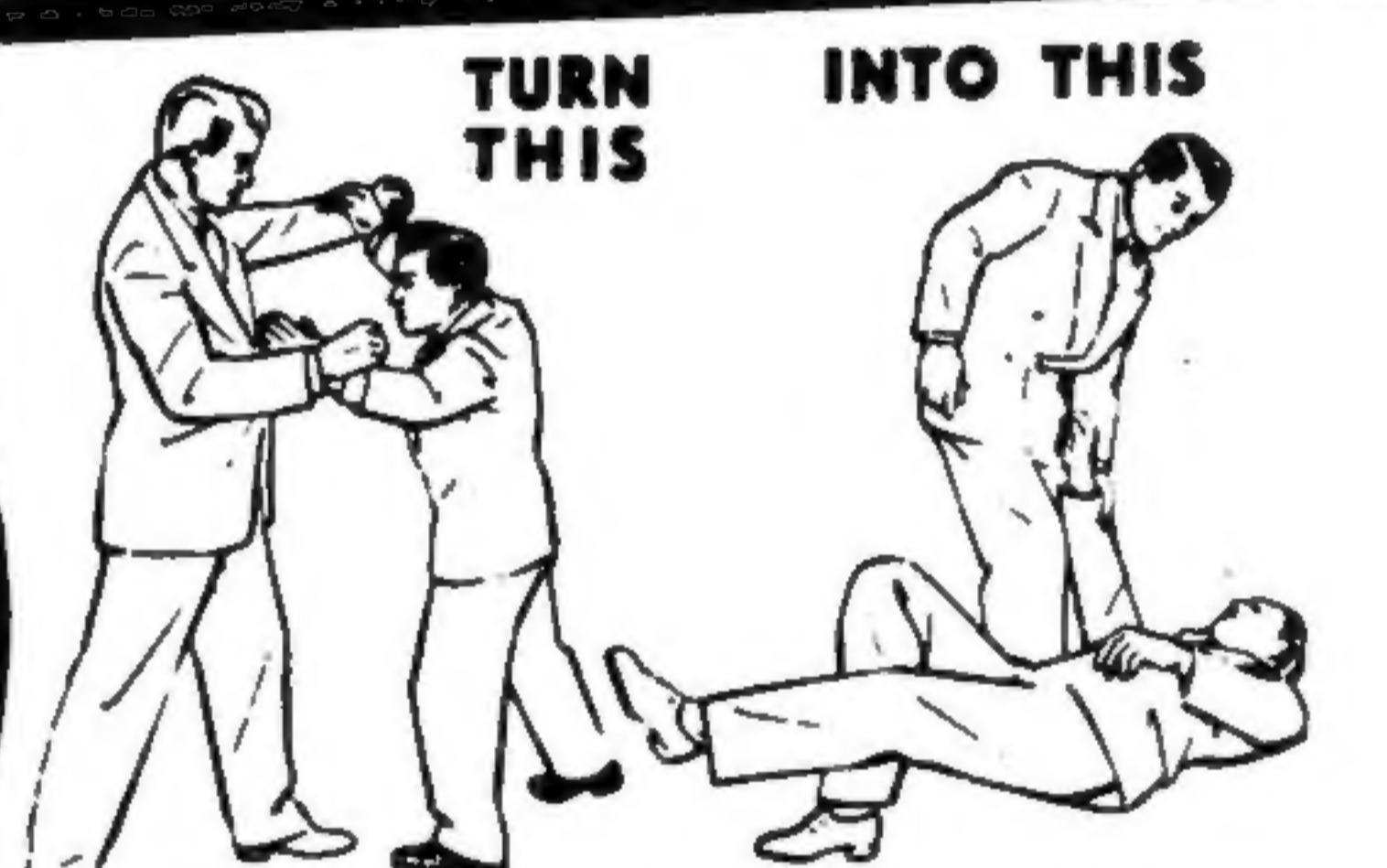
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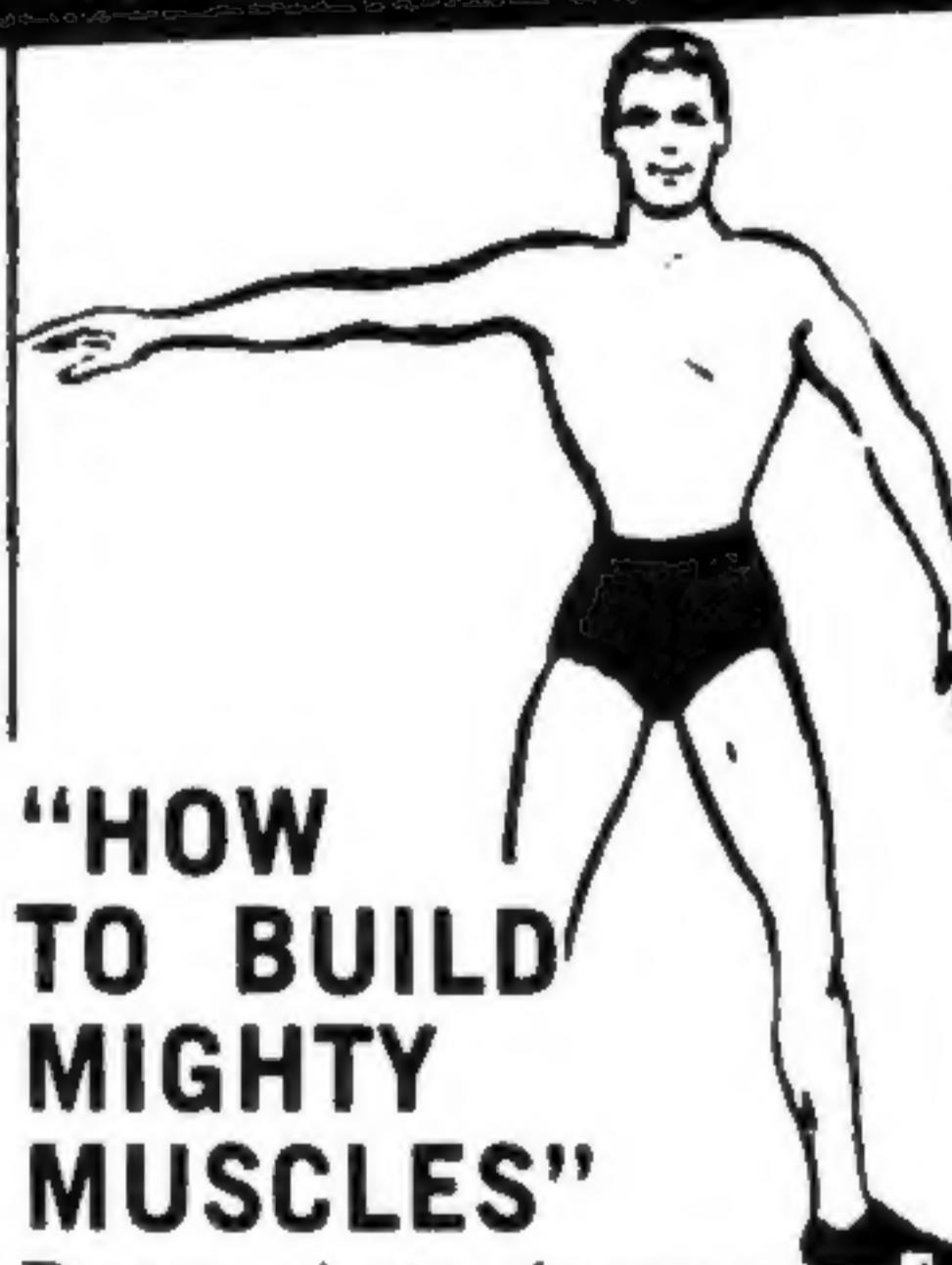
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THREE WAS A SPLINTERING CRASH AS THE CAR RIPPED THROUGH THE WOODEN RAILING AND HURLED OVER THE EMBANKMENT, END OVER END, UNTIL IT CAME TO REST AT THE BOTTOM!



AMOMENT LATER, THERE WAS A DEAFENING EXPLOSION--THE FLAMES HAD REACHED THE GAS TANK!



THE POLICE FOUND THE REMAINS OF THE WRECK---

WELL, WHOEVER WAS DRIVING THIS ONE WON'T BE TELLING ABOUT IT!

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN---TAKE A LOOK!



ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN A HUMAN BEING WAS A MASS OF CRUSHED, BROKEN BONES, SPARSELY COVERED BY CHARRED BLACK FLESH! THE CORONER WAS ABOUT TO PRONOUNCE CASPER DEAD, WHEN...

HE BREATHED! GOOD GOD--THIS MAN IS STILL ALIVE!



THERE WAS NOTHING THEY COULD DO! NO AMOUNT OF SURGERY COULD BEGIN TO RESTORE CASPER TO ANY SEMBLANCE OF A HUMAN BEING! AND SO HE LAY THERE--BLIND, DEAF, UNABLE TO SPEAK OR MOVE OR FEEL--DEAD IN EVERY RESPECT BUT ONE--HIS MIND STILL FUNCTIONED---



AND THROUGH THE ETERNAL VOID OF HIS DEATH-LIKE EXISTENCE, HE KEPT HEARING THE WORDS OF THE MAN WITH THE SKULL'S EYES--

IT IS OUR BUSINESS TO PREVENT DEATH! WE HAVE NEVER YET LOST A SINGLE CUSTOMER!!



THE END